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ABSTRACT

This course is divided into seven units, each focusing on a particular aspect of television. The unit topics and some of the subtopics included are: (1) television and the American viewer; (2) the television industry (the networks, the role of the Federal Communications Commission, public television, and the business of television); (3) programs and production (television dramatic form, characterization, film and tape, the camera); (4) television selling (advertising, message persuasion, public service announcements, and political commercials and editorializing); (5) television news; (6) the social effects of television; and (7) the future of television (focusing on the influence of cable television, home video systems, and communications satellites, and on the role of the viewer in influencing decision making about television programming). Each unit contains textual material about television and its role in society; activities are for use either individually, in small groups, or by an entire class. Readings present further information and also, frequently, people's opinions about television. An index is provided. (GL)

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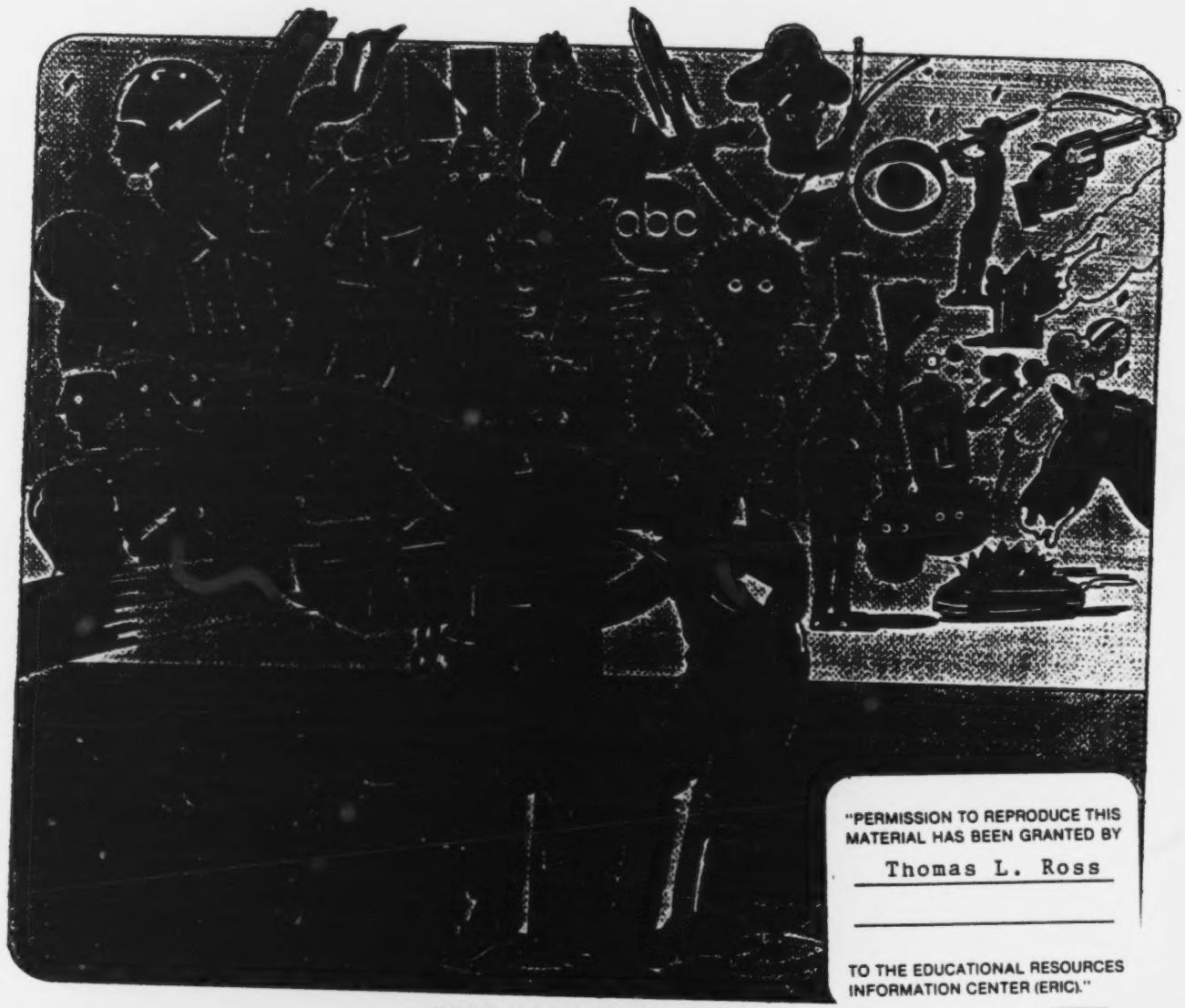
By Ned White



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Les Brown, whose *New York Times Encyclopedia of Television* served as an invaluable source of information and verification of facts;

staff members of the three networks, for their generous cooperation in supplying us with needed information.

Introduction

In the early days of broadcast television – the late 1940s – it was common to see a large group of people huddled around a small screen to watch a special dramatic presentation or sports event. When sets were expensive and television was new, viewing was not a habit; it was a special occasion.

Now Americans spend much of their leisure time with television. On any night, about half of us are at home with the set on. Sometimes we're watching a specific program, but at other times we're just watching whatever is on. That would be fine were it not for a continuing series of studies which indicate that heavy television viewing can be a problem – especially for those who don't watch television critically. It has been shown that, depending on what and how much we watch, television messages can dramatically affect our reactions to people, places, and events in the real world. Television is not only a series of programs prepared for our entertainment, but also a powerful force which has a strong influence on the way many of us think and act.

This course seeks to explore how you handle television. It does not ask you to turn off your TV set and do something else; it does not pretend to tell you what programs are "good" and "bad"; it does not, in fact, take the position that television itself is either "good" or "bad." What it does is offer you a variety of information, opinion, and activities to help you arrive at your own conclusions about television.

The complete course is divided into seven units, each focusing on a particular aspect of television. Each unit has four parts:

1. The *text* provides information about television and its role in our society.
2. The *activities*, which can be done individually, in small groups, or by the class as a whole, suggest ways in which you can use the text information to deepen your understanding of television.
3. The *readings* present further information and also, frequently, people's opinions about television. The readings entitled "In Conversation with . . ." are based on original interviews with television professionals: producers, actors, critics, advertisers, and others. Other readings are reprints of newspaper and magazine articles.
4. *Worksheets*, which will be distributed to you in class, give you the opportunity to perform numerous role-playing activities (interviewing, scheduling programs, writing your own news show). Other worksheets present brief written exercises. You should keep all your completed worksheets clipped together in a folder, since from time to time you may be asked to refer back to them.

At the end of the course, you should have a much more thorough understanding of the television industry, and of how you can become a wise, selective television viewer.

Inside Television

A Guide to Critical Viewing

Unit 1 You and Television

This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely lights and wires in a box.
– Edward R. Murrow

In 1961, Newton Minow, then the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC),* wrote in a published letter to the editors of *TV Guide*, "Television is the most powerful instrument ever devised for reaching the minds and hearts of men." Few people would disagree with him. Television is easy to get to, and it has "instant on." By checking the program schedule and twisting the dial, we can choose almost any nourishment we want for our minds and hearts. We can learn or question. We can be sad or joyful, frightened or lulled to sleep. We watch for many reasons: to relax, to be soothed, to forget our problems for a while, to have company when we're alone, to glimpse a variety of worlds different from our own.

Television must be doing something right for us. Some of us spend more time watching television than sleeping, but even those who watch little or no television are never far from its influence. How many times do we start the day at school or at work to be greeted by a friend who asks, "Did you see _____ last night?" How often can we walk into a drug store, a supermarket, or just about any retail store without seeing some by-product of television: a poster of "Fonzie" or "Mork"; magazines whose covers are decorated with photos of TV stars, paperback books that are "spin-offs" from television shows; toys, games, and thousands of other items carrying the banner "As Seen on TV!" How often, in fact, can we visit an airlines terminal, a hotel lobby, or a barber shop without confronting a television set, usually on?

* *Federal Communications Commission (FCC): government agency empowered to regulate interstate communications by television, radio, wire, and cable.*

Edward R. Murrow, generally regarded as broadcasting's most respected journalist, joined CBS in 1935 and remained with the network until 1961. A leading radio commentator during World War II, Murrow made the transition to television through two distinguished documentary series, See It Now *and* Person to Person. *He died in 1965.*

Activity 1 How Television Touches Your Life

Think about the ways that television touches your life – what things in your life are partly or completely a result of television? List them on a piece of paper.

Activity 2

The Numbers Game

On a separate piece of paper, try answering the ten questions below. You may know the answers to some; others you may have to guess. Try your best, and then compare your responses with the correct answers that your teacher will give you from the Teacher's Guide.

1. Boys aged twelve to eighteen watch more television than girls of the same age. True or false?
2. What is the most popular night of the week for watching TV?
3. About how many people are watching on that night of the week?
4. In 1979, the second most popular program for adult men wasn't even in the top ten programs for adult women. What was the program?
5. If you lived in an American family of five or more people, how many hours a day would the TV set be on in your home?
6. Since 1950, the number of hours per day that an average American family watches television has always shown a steady increase. True or false?
7. Children aged two to five spend about 1 percent of their television viewing time between the hours of 11:00 pm and 1:00 am Monday through Saturday. True or false?
8. Among adult viewers, who watches more TV, men or women?
9. The number of acts of violence on television has shown a steady increase over the years. True or false?
10. In 1979, suspense and mystery programs were the most popular prime time* shows. True or false?

** prime time: the hours between 8:00 and 11:00 pm, Monday through Saturday, and 7:00 and 11:00 pm, Sunday.*

Activity 3

Without TV

Choose one of the two writing topics below.

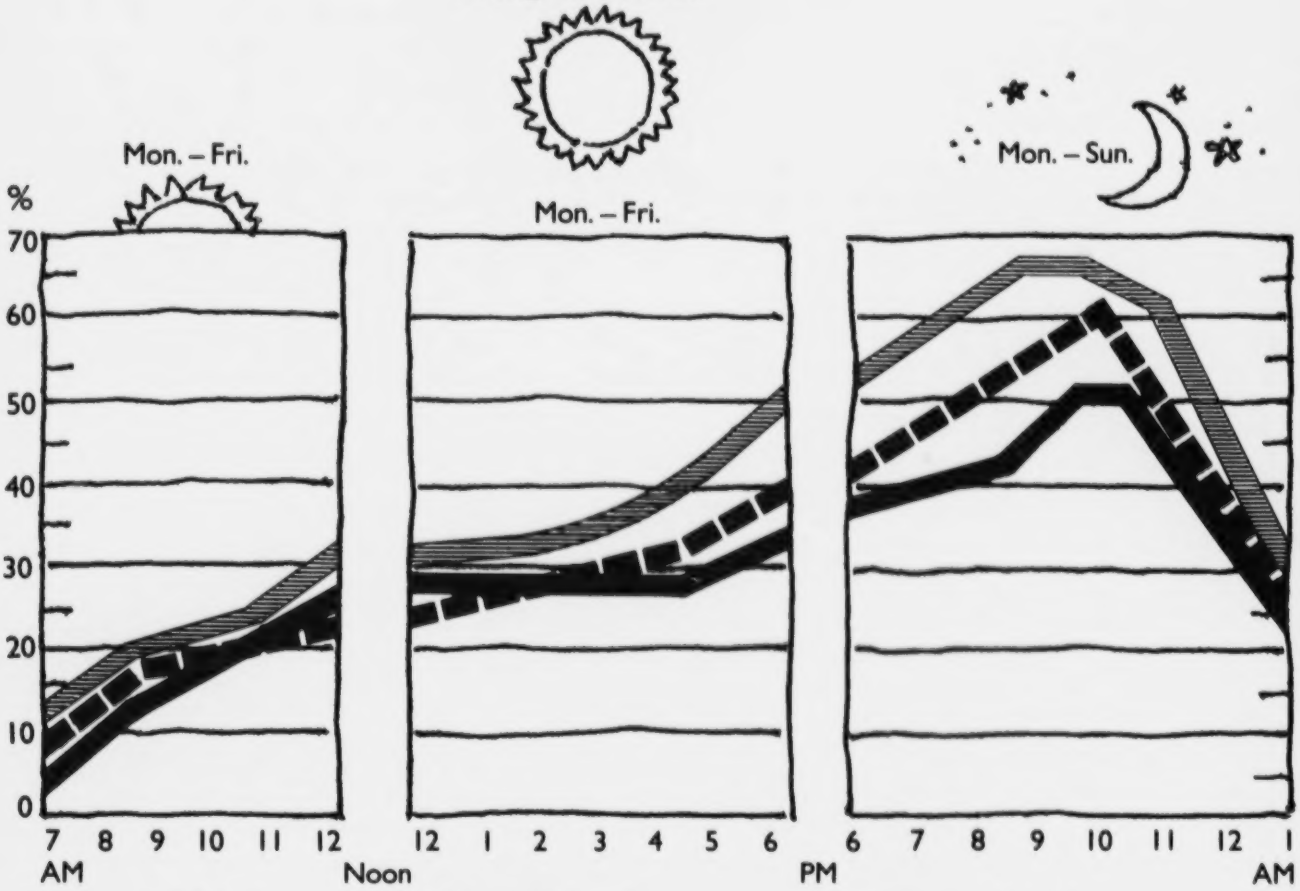
1. After consulting your doctor, you learn to your horror that your entire family is afflicted with an extremely rare allergy that has just begun to show its symptoms – dizziness, blurred vision, shortness of breath. The allergy? Television! The doctor insists that for your own good, you haul the TV set upstairs to the attic and forget about it.

   Write about your first week without television. Be as specific as you can in describing the kinds of things you'd do and the feelings you would have.
2. Find out what it was like to be a young person growing up without television. Interview a parent or grandparent or someone else who grew up without TV. How did the person spend his or her free time? Do you think the person was bored more or less often than you and your friends? Write a brief story about one day in that person's life.

Television and the American Viewer

The A.C. Nielsen Company is well known for its measurement of television audiences – the "Nielsen ratings." It collects information in several ways on who's watching what, and when they are watching. Every year the Nielsen Company publishes general information on American viewing habits in its booklet, "Nielsen Television." Some results of 1979 Nielsen research appear in graph form below.

Percent of TV Households Using Television



Nielsen Estimates – Total U.S.
N.Y. Time, Except N.Y.T. +3 Hours in Pacific Territory

Adapted from A. C. Nielsen Company.

Activity 4

Average Daily TV Use

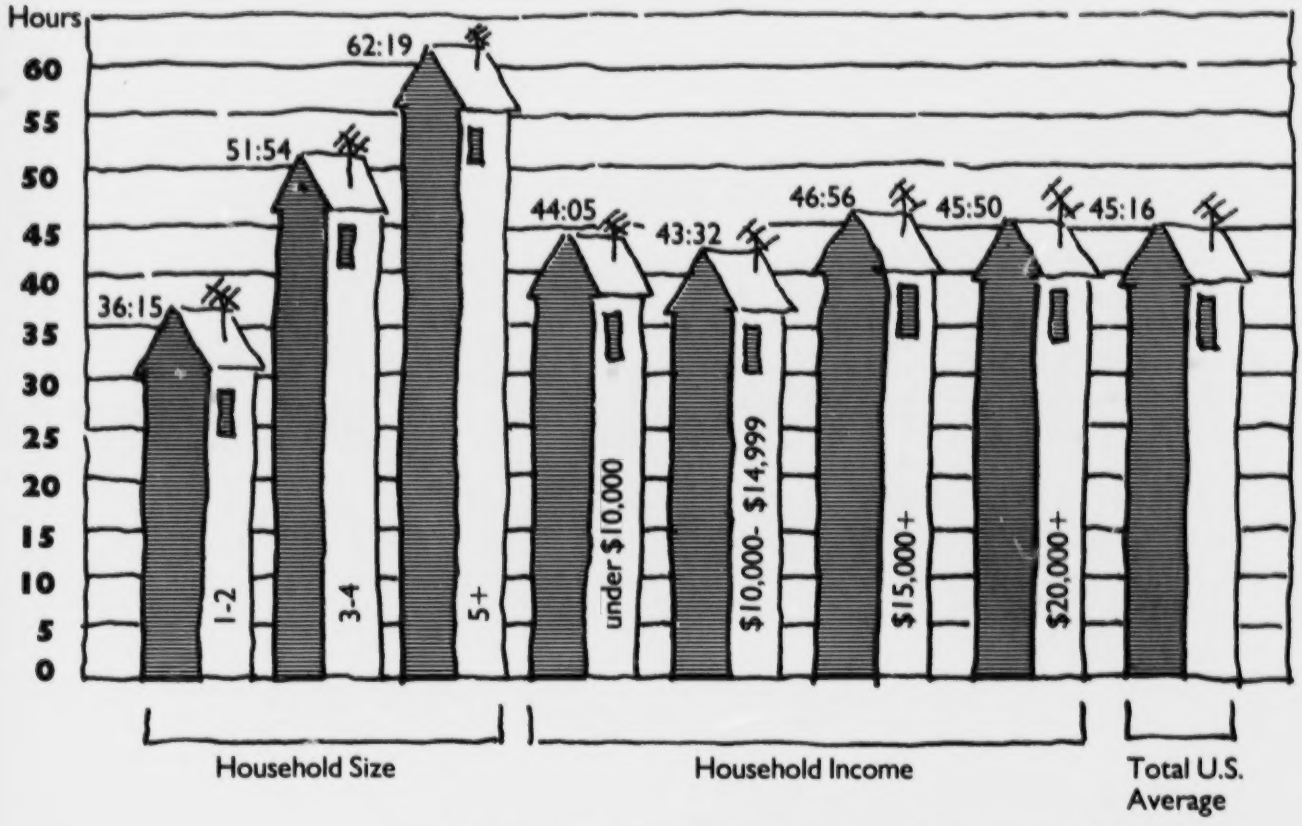
Refer to the preceding graph and answer the following questions:

1. In February, at what hour were the most people watching television? At what time in July were the most people watching? How do you explain the difference?
2. What happens to viewing between 5:00 and 6:00 pm (annual average)? What might be the cause?

5

3. Between 4:00 and 5:00 pm in July, viewing stayed about the same. But what happens between these hours in February? How do you explain the difference?
4. Does any information in this graph surprise you? What is it, and why is it surprising?

Hours of TV Usage Per Week By Household Characteristics



Nielsen Estimates: National Audience Demographics Report Average of October – December '78, February, April, May, July '79

Adapted from A. C. Nielsen Company.

Activity 5

Family Size Affects TV Use

1. Smaller households (one or two people) have the set on nine hours less per week than the national average. Larger households (five or more) use the TV more than sixteen hours a week over the average. What might be the reason for this difference?
2. Does the wealth of a household or family affect the amount of television usage? Is this information surprising to you? Why or why not?

Activity 6

When People Watch

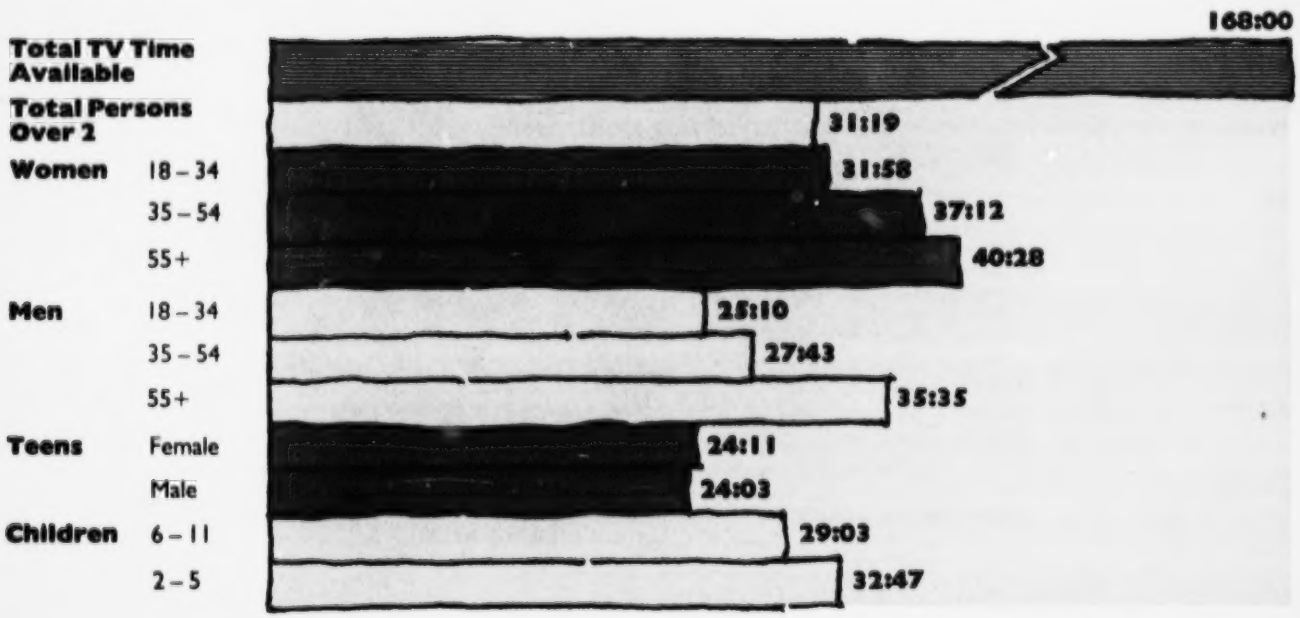
Study the following four graphs, which are adapted from A. C. Nielsen research. Note that the first graph shows how may hours and minutes per week different people watch television. The next three graphs indicate how much television these different people watch during different time periods: Monday through Friday, 10:00 am – 4:30 pm; Monday through Friday, 4:30 pm – 7:30 pm; and prime time, Monday through Saturday, 8:00 pm – 11:00 pm, and Sunday, 7:00 pm – 11:00 pm.

After studying these graphs, try to answer these questions:

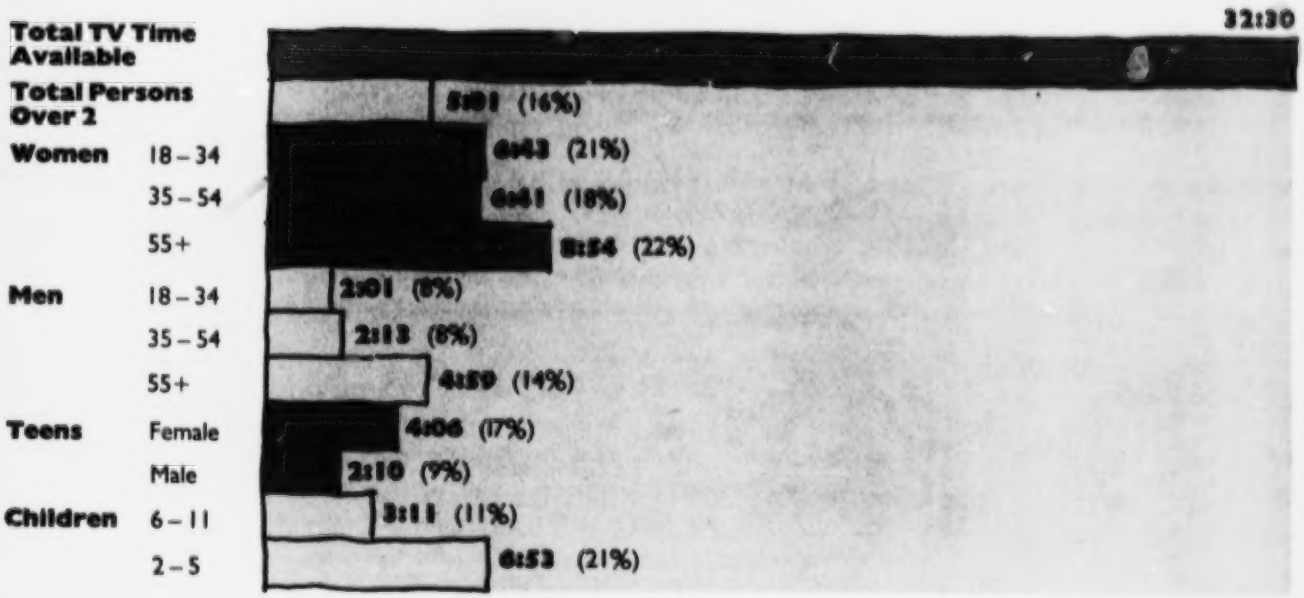
1. Which group watches the most TV per week?
2. Which group watches the least TV per week?
3. What is the national average of viewing time per week for *all* people? Why is this figure different from the national average of hours of *TV usage* per week?
4. Which four groups watch the most prime time television per week (Graph 4)?
5. In Graph 2, we see figures for daytime viewing. Which group watches the most TV during this time?
6. In Graph 3, we see figures for afternoon and early evening viewing. Which four groups watch the most TV during this time?
7. Is any single figure in any of these graphs surprising to you? If so, which one? Why?

For each of your answers, be prepared to suggest some possible reasons for the differences in how people divide up their viewing time.

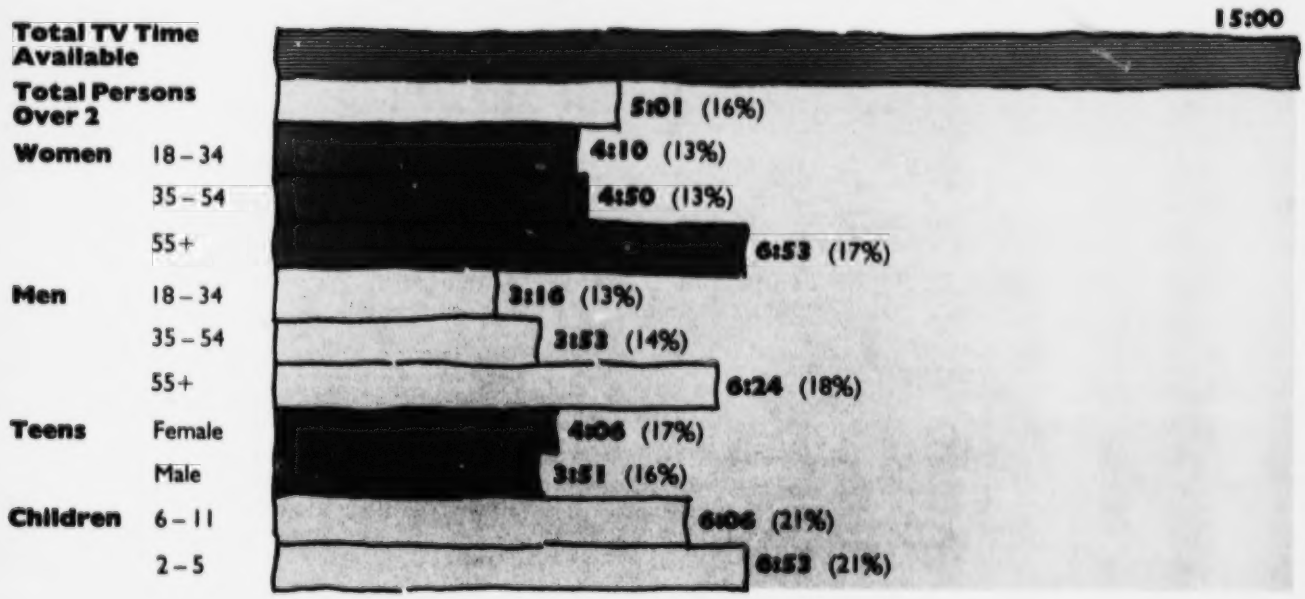
1. Total TV Viewing Per Week



2. Viewing Time With Percentages Mon – Fri 10:00 am – 4:30 pm



3. Viewing Time With Percentages Mon – Fri 4:30 – 7:30 pm



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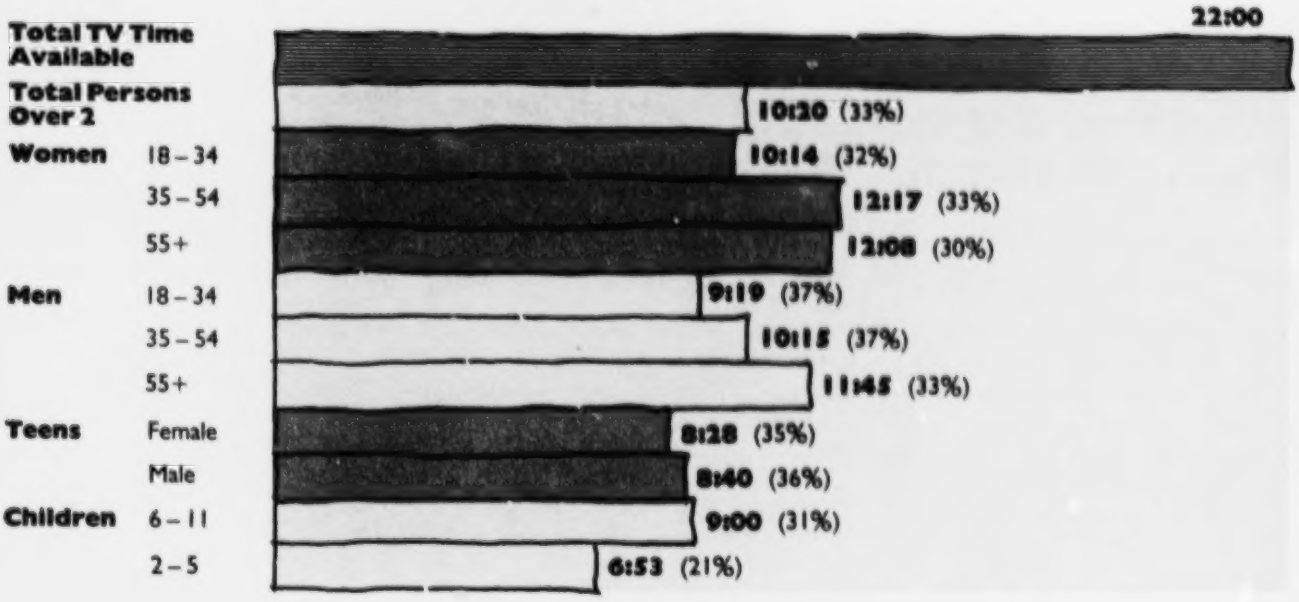
4. Viewing Time
With Percentages
Mon – Sat
8:00 – 11:00 pm
Sun 7:00 – 11:00 pm



Activity 7

Opinion Poll: The Effects of TV

Conduct brief interviews with two or three people – a fellow student, a family member, an adult in your community, etc. Ask each one some questions about how television affects his or her life (urge each person to be brief), and write down the answers.

Some possible questions:

1. How much television do you watch?
2. How is it helpful to you?
3. How is it not helpful to you?
4. How do you think television affects people who watch a lot of it?
5. How do you select what you watch?

Add any other questions you think will help you develop a better understanding of the effects of watching TV.

Reading

1.1 *A former NBC programming chief writes about why people watch TV, and what they watch. What does the author tell us about how people select television programs?*

Why You Watch What You Watch When You Watch

The answer is to be found in "The Theory of the Least Objectionable Program"
by Paul L. Klein
excerpted from *TV Guide*
July 24, 1971

It is about time that you all stop lying to each other and face up to your problems: you love television and you view too much.

I used to be the guy in charge of the ratings at NBC, and my waking hours were filled with people either complaining about how inaccurate the ratings were or, without my asking them, volunteering that they "never watch TV, because the programs stink, particularly this season."

Let's look at the facts, because only by examining the nature of the disease can we cure it, or at least make peace with it.

The Census Bureau tells us that 96 percent of U.S. homes have a television set (and over a third of those have two or more sets, with the number of homes and sets growing each day). The Census Bureau also shows that TV penetration* is highest among the more affluent and better-educated segment of the population. In fact, 99 percent of the homes with over $15,000 annual income have at least one TV set – the majority of them have more than one – and most of them have a color set. And also we all know how they complain about the programs and how they say they never watch the stuff.

The truth is that you buy extra sets, color sets, and even pay a monthly charge for CATV* to view television. Yet when you view an evening's worth of TV you are full of complaints about what you have viewed. But the next night you're right back there, hoping against hope for satisfying content, never really learning from experience, and another night is shot. Instead of turning the set off and doing something else, you persist in exercising the medium.

With more TV sets and clearer, more colorful pictures on those sets, you are tuned to TV *more* this year than last, and last year more than the previous year, etc.

The fact is that you view TV regardless of its content. Because of the nature of the limited spectrum (only a few channels in each city) and the economic need of the networks to attract an audience large enough to attain advertising dollars which will cover the cost of production of the TV program, pay the station carrying the program, and also make a profit, you are viewing programs which by necessity must appeal to the rich and poor, smart and stupid, tall and short, wild and tame, together. Therefore, you are in the vast majority of cases viewing something that is not to your taste. From the time you bought a set to now, you have viewed thousands of programs which were not to your taste. The result is the hiding of, and lying about, all that viewing. Because of the hiding and lying, you are guilty. The guilt is expressed in the feeling that "I should have been reading instead of viewing."

It is of course much more difficult to read than to view, even for people making over $15,000 a year – and certainly for Uncle Fud, whom I'll get to later. Reading requires a process called *decoding*, which causes a slowdown in the information taken in by the user. TV viewing is very simple to do – kids do it better than adults because they are unencumbered by guilt – and the amount of information derived from an hour's viewing is infinitely more than is derived from an hour's reading.

But print has been around for a long time and it has attracted people who have learned to express themselves in this medium, so the printed content, on the whole, is superior to the TV content. Still, most of us prefer television.

Despite the lack of quality content, the visual medium is so compelling that it attracts the vast majority of adults each day to a progression of shows that most of these people would ignore in printed form.

The process of viewing works like this:

A family has just finished dinner and one member says, "Let's see what's on TV tonight." The set gets turned on or *TV Guide* gets pulled out. If it's *TV Guide*, then the list of programs (most of which are repeats) is so unappealing that each member of the family says to himself that he remembers when *TV Guide* made an awful error in its program listings back in 1967 and maybe it has happened again.

The set is turned on whether a good program is listed or not at that time. Chances are over 100 to 1 that there is nothing on that meets this or any family's taste at that moment. But the medium meets their taste.

The viewer(s) then slowly turns the channel selector, grumbling at each image he sees on the screen. Perhaps he'll go around the dial two or three times before settling on one channel whose program is *least objectionable*.

* *TV penetration: the percentage of households able to receive television in a given area.*

* *CATV: Community Antenna Television (the early name for cable television). A pay service.*

"Well, let's watch this," someone in the family says. "There's nothing better on." So they watch. No one thinks of jogging a couple of laps around the block or getting out the old Parcheesi board. They watch whatever is least objectionable.

The programmers for the networks have argued that this is a "most satisfying" choice – not LOP (least objectionable program). But if it were, then why would everybody be complaining and lying about TV viewing? I don't deny that in some rare time periods, "least objectionable" is actually most satisfying, but the bulk of the time people are viewing programs they don't particularly consider good, and *that* is why the medium is so powerful and rich.

Readers of this magazine will complain to me, even after admitting they practice LOP more than they should, that their LOP is usually not represented among the "Top 10" or, another way of looking at it, that the Top 10 Nielsen programs contain so many shows *they* never view.

. . .

All "home ratings" techniques equate a home with one old man who lives in one room with an outhouse (Uncle Fud) viewing *Gunsmoke*, with a family of four in a Great Neck, N.Y., Tudor, viewing *Laugh-In*. One home, one vote. If more Uncle Fuds are viewing *Gunsmoke* than Tudors are viewing *Laugh-In*, *Gunsmoke* is said to be "beating" *Laugh-In* in the ratings. Nonsense!

"Top 10" is a measure of set tuning. Uncle Fud's set (and he can't read, so he gets no satisfaction out of seeing *his* program in the Top 10) is worth the same as your set. It seems fair, but it isn't. Uncle Fud and his cohorts have nothing else to do (no other media competition) and therefore their weight in the home population and their consistency of viewing can yield an illusion of popularity that is irrelevant and bad for the medium.

Before advertisers became sophisticated, they purchased advertising, and paid the most money for advertising time, on the programs with the highest ratings. Almost always these programs were loaded with Uncle Fuds, people who could not buy enough of the advertised product to pay for the advertising time. Yet these high-rated programs made the programs opposite them low-rated – because high-rated and low-rated are relative in the kind of TV system we have. Uncle Fud's choice then stayed on and was imitated by other producers looking for "hits" or Top 10 programs and the low-rated shows were droppped.

As the irrelevancy of these measures began to be understood, particularly in the past year, we saw for the first time high-rated programs being dropped and low-rated programs being kept on.

. . .The concept of hits has changed. A hit is a program that reaches a mass of young adults, preferably those who live in the big cities.

The operation of LOP dictates that small-town families who used to love *Family Affair* will now be forced to view a Least Objectionable Program from three urban-appeal offerings, just as in the past the urban audience was forced to pick between three rural-appeal programs in many time periods.

When two networks played rural-appeal offerings in a time period, the third network would find it advisable to play an urban-appeal program to "counterprogram" the time period. If the rural-appeal program had its traditional slant, it would, particularly in the early evening, cream off the kids and old ladies (I call this bimodal) in the urban centers as well, and this unbeatable cartel (kids and old ladies, who have remarkably similar tastes) would beat the urban-appeal program in audience size.

Marcus Welby, M.D. was the season's big hit and it is *not* rural-appeal, but urban-appeal. And it is not bimodal, just the opposite – strong young adult. Why does this show succeed in the face of my previously stated theories behind high ratings? The reason is that *Marcus Welby* always plays against at least one public-affairs program and on some weeks it plays against two (*CBS News Hour* every week and *First Tuesday* once a month).

The lying and the guilt are all wrapped up in this time period. We view too much TV, we view content we dislike, content that is frivolous, unsatisfying, unrewarding. We state that what we want from TV is more important content–like public affairs. Well, when public affairs is on, we really want to see it, we really should see it, but it is too objectionable compared to the entertainment programs opposite it.

. . .

Things are going to change in TV. The medium itself will change. People love TV. They love the ease of viewing and the ease of distribution; video pictures delivered right to the home. Somebody's going to figure out how to give this medium more satisfying content – not remove the guilt completely, but reduce the guilt as we head toward a completely visual culture.

Felix the Cat, television's first performer, as he appeared on an early 60-scan line screen in 1929. This picture was transmitted from New York to Kansas by RCA/NBC cameras.

Unit 2 The Television Industry

Yes, there are heavy users of television, and they watch commercial television. And commercial television has decided it's good business to do this, to concentrate on the audience of heavy users, and in effect they've said nuts to everyone else . . . With 110 million people to work with at nine o'clock on a Sunday night, or with 80 million at eight o'clock, the networks know that an audience will always be there; the game is how to carve it up, how to get the largest share of that audience.

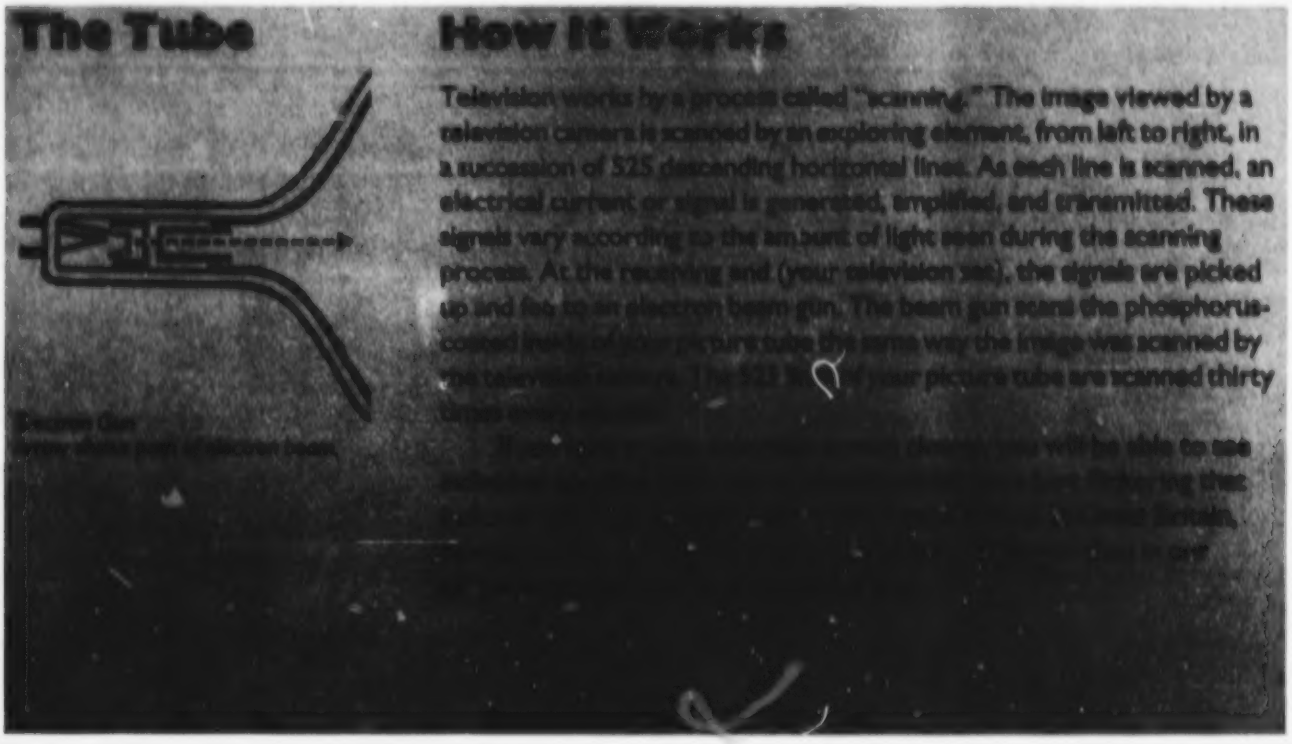
– Les Brown*

* *From an interview January 8, 1979. Les Brown, television reporter for the* New York Times, *is the author of* Television: The Business Behind the Box *and the* New York Times Encyclopedia of Television.

* *airwaves: the electromagnetic frequencies used for transmission of radio and television signals.*

The backbone of commercial television broadcasting in this country is formed by the 723 local stations around the country (June 1978 figure). These stations are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to use airwaves* that are owned by the public.

Most stations – about 600 in all – are affiliated with one of the three commercial networks – ABC-TV, CBS-TV, or NBC-TV – and carry programming prepared by the networks. The remaining commercial stations are *independent*. That is, they are not directly connected to the networks. They seek their own advertisers and buy their own programs from non-network sources.



Some additional television stations belong to the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). As we will see, public television is set up very differently from commercial television.

Each commercial network has roughly 200 local stations affiliated with it. These stations are fed network programs by cable and microwave transmission at certain times during the day. Stations are not required to carry all the network programs sent to them, but most affiliates carry the majority of what they receive, so as much as 60 percent of all their programming comes from the network. In fact, if a local affiliate begins airing too much of its own local programming in place of the network's offerings (for instance, with locally produced sports and public affairs), it is certain to lose favor with the network and may endanger its affiliate status. Most affiliates prefer to broadcast what the network feeds them; it's easier and usually just as profitable. But even so, there are times that local stations, when they preview network programs, find certain program material offensive or objectionable to their audience and will not broadcast it.

Local stations make money from advertising. They receive advertising revenue in three forms:

- from *local advertising*: businesses in the station's area produce commercials and air them on the local stations only;
- from *spot television advertising*: large national companies buy commercials on a variety of local stations around the country; and
- from *network payments* to them for airing national advertising: the network pays each station that broadcasts a national ad an amount of money that varies according to the size of the audience the station serves.

Local network affiliate stations are, on the whole, much bigger businesses than independent stations. Network programs are heavily promoted by the networks in newspapers and on TV. Network news is very popular, and television viewers are generally in the habit of staying with a known schedule of entertainment.

Independent stations, however, are a growing trend in television. Before 1952, television stations broadcast over twelve channels (Channels 2 through 13)* over Very High Frequency (VHF). Many of these stations quickly became network affiliates. In that year, however, the FCC opened up the Ultra High Frequency (UHF) band to television broadcast, assigning it channel numbers 14 through 83. The number of independent stations grew dramatically, but until the mid-60s many of them went bankrupt because most sets were poorly equipped to receive them. Now, however, about 200 commercial UHF stations operate in this country, some 65 of them as independents. Even though they buy or produce their own programs, relying heavily on sports, old movies, and off-network reruns,* they have proven that they can be profitable. Many independent UHF stations offer programs to specialized audiences – religion and foreign language programs, for example. Still, independent stations, in comparison with network affiliates, do poorly attracting audiences.

* *Channel 1 was removed from VHF by the FCC in 1948 to be used for land-mobile and two-way radio service.*

* *off-network reruns: programs originally carried by networks, but now distributed to individual television stations through syndication.*

In general, the television broadcasting industry is arranged in such a way that "bigness" is rewarded. Network affiliate stations get the giant's share of the pie, while independents go their own way with much less revenue.

Although the television network system was founded on the idea of the importance of local stations, the three major networks soon developed into the main force in American television. They supply well-promoted, expensively produced programs to their affiliate stations and pay them money (*station compensation*) for airing the shows. The networks also offer big-name stars and national and international news gathering and reporting. This kind of lavish programming draws large numbers of viewers to a station, many of whom stay tuned when the station begins to air non-network programs; this increases advertising income. And since the networks set up their own programs and schedules, network affiliates need to be responsible for only a partial broadcast schedule each day.

The Networks

ABC

Before 1977, ABC (the American Broadcasting Company, Inc.) was the "little sister" network to CBS and NBC. ABC was founded in 1943 when the FCC ruled that NBC had to give up one of its radio networks.

© American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.

Old ABC logo.

Its first real success was the introduction of *Disneyland* and *The Mickey Mouse Club* in the early 1950s, when many local stations became ABC affiliates just to air those programs. ABC's ratings were also boosted sharply by its telecasting of the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954. Also, ABC's management had strong ties to the movie business, and the network led the way in developing several filmed dramatic series produced by Hollywood film studios (especially Warner Brothers, which made *Cheyenne, 77 Sunset Strip, Hawaiian Eye, Maverick,* and other popular TV shows during the middle and late 1950s).

ABC scored other successes as well. Under the leadership of its president, Roone Arledge, ABC Sports led the field with its *Wide World of Sports* and *Monday Night Football.* ABC also aired weekly full-length movies to bigger audiences than NBC, and at a much lower cost.

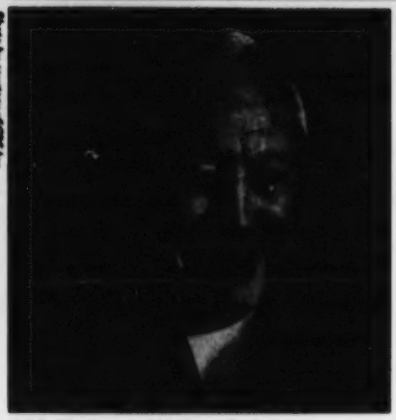
Even so, the network lagged behind the others until it hired Fred Silverman from CBS to make programming decisions. *Happy Days, Laverne and Shirley, The Six Million Dollar Man, Baretta, Charlie's Angels,* and other hugely popular programs lifted ABC into first place by 1977, bypassing both CBS and NBC in only two years.

New ABC logo.

What ABC Owns:

Five television stations, four radio networks, fourteen radio stations
Paramount Pictures
More than 400 movie theaters
ABC Records (Dunhill, Impulse, Westminster)
ABC International
ABC Worldvision (sixty-four TV stations in other parts of the world)

Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.



CBS Chairman William Paley.

CBS

CBS (formerly the Columbia Broadcasting System) was the leading television network up until 1977 when ABC took over first place in the ratings. It is owned by its parent company, CBS, Inc. CBS is often considered the most prestigious and glamorous of the three networks. Over the years, under the guidance of its chairman, William S. Paley, it has built up a stable of big-name stars. Some of these, like Jack Benny and Red Skelton, were lured away from rival NBC during the late 1940s.

Until recently, CBS's programs were broadcast to more areas around the country than programs by either other network. It sought to have Channel 2 assigned to its affiliate stations whenever possible. The Channel 2 signal carries farther than any other (the higher the channel number, the less range it has), so it can draw more viewers. Using Channel 2 gave CBS an automatic edge in the ratings.

CBS has had a string of successes. In the 1960s, its "rural appeal" programs (*Beverly Hillbillies, The Andy Griffith Show,* etc.) were very popular. Through much of the 1970s it led its rivals with situation comedies, notably *All In The Family*. Its leading newscaster, Walter Cronkite, has been identified by opinion polls as the most trusted man in the country. But CBS has had failures, too: its color television system in the early 1950s failed because it would not work on monochrome (black and white) sets. It tried to market its own television sets at around the same time but ended up losing money.

Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

Old CBS logo.

What CBS Owns:

Four television stations, fourteen radio stations
Columbia Records and Record Club
Fender Guitars
Rogers Drums
Holt, Rinehart and Winston (publishers)
W.B. Saunders (textbook publishers)
Franklin School of Science and Art, Philadelphia
Creative Playthings, Inc. (toys)
CBS Labs (laser, defense items)
Memorex (recording tape)
Dacom (computer data processing)
BFA Educational Media (educational films)
Several magazines including: *Woman's Day, Field & Stream, Road Track, World Tennis, Sea,* and others.

New CBS logo.

29

NBC

NBC, the National Broadcasting Company, is owned entirely by RCA (Radio Corporation of America). NBC is the only network controlled by a company larger than itself. Founded by Westinghouse, General Electric, and RCA, NBC is the oldest network, but it has always been just behind CBS in viewer popularity. In many ways, NBC has been especially adventuresome in creating new ideas for television programs. It invented the "spectacular" (now called the "special") with the 1950s broadcasts of *Peter Pan* and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. It was the first network to show movies during prime time, first to present a ninety-minute drama, first to have two news anchormen (Huntley and Brinkley), and first to offer the one-minute "update" newscast. NBC aggressively pursued color television in the 1950s and was first to present all its shows in color.

NBC is sometimes referred to as the network of "event television." It prides itself on its many star-studded specials: movies, variety programs, long adventure shows.

What RCA Owns:

The National Broadcasting Company (NBC)
Five television stations, six radio stations
Globcom (international telecommunication network)
RCA American Communications, Inc.
Apollo/Saturn Program System
RCA Records
Banquet Foods (frozen foods)
Coronet Industries (carpets, wall coverings)
Random House, Inc. (publishers)
The Hertz Corporation
NBC Educational Enterprises (film distribution to schools)
Part interest in Walt Disney World

Station Groups

Next to the networks, station groups are the most potent force in commercial broadcasting. A group is a company that owns and operates a number of stations. The Federal Communications Commission limits groups to seven television stations each, with no more than five stations on the VHF band.

Well-known groups include Group W (Westinghouse Broadcasting Company), Metromedia, Capital Cities, Taft, Storer, Cox, and Post-Newsweek. Some groups are affiliated with only one network, while others are affiliated with two or three.

Group W is considered the most important station group. It is affiliated with all three networks (and, therefore, some people in the industry feel, it is in a position to be somewhat of an "insider" in all of them), and it owns and operates stations in Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Formed in the mid-1960s, Group W took the lead in producing public affairs programs, dropping cigarette commercials before doing so was required by law, and helping to see that the Prime Time Access Rule was adopted (see below in the Federal Communications Commission section).

The Federal Communications Commission

The Federal Communications Commission was established by Congress in the Communications Act of 1934 to act "in behalf of the people" – that is, to regulate communication by radio, wire (telephone and telegraph), and, later, television. Up until then, radio stations clogged the airwaves without regulation, which meant that their signals often overlapped each other – which in turn meant that listeners often had the unpleasant experience of having to listen to several stations at once instead of just the one they had tuned to.

Today the FCC has the authority to license broadcasting stations and to reject or renew their licenses every three years. It requires broadcasters to serve the "public interest, convenience, and necessity." This is because the airwaves are owned by the people – not by the stations or networks.

What does "public interest, convenience, and necessity" mean? It is regarded as the most important phrase in the Communications Act, but also one of the most vague. One network official has described "public interest" as "whatever interests the public." Still others believe the phrase means that broadcasters should do a lot more for the people (whose airwaves they use) than just entertain them.

The FCC may make rules, hold hearings, and establish guidelines for broadcasters, but it may not act as a censor of program material. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution promises free speech and a free press throughout the nation. These rights extend generally into freedom of expression for television program material, with the traditional exceptions of obscenity, slander, libel, and defamation of character.

The Communications Act of 1934, and some later FCC rulings, include some important provisions:

The *Equal Time Law* (Section 315 of the Communications Act) states that when a station offers air time to a political candidate, it must offer an equal amount of time at the same price to qualified opposing candidates running for the same office. In 1970 this idea was expanded to specify that stations must offer equal time to the *supporters* of political candidates too.

The *Fairness Doctrine* grew out of the public interest spirit of the Communications Act but was not clearly defined until 1949. It says that television stations must broadcast discussions of both sides of important controversial issues. Before 1949, television stations were not allowed to offer opinions about public issues or to speak out for or against political candidates. The Fairness Doctrine cleared the way for television editorials and also for the broadcasting of opposing comments on those editorials by members of the public.

Family Viewing Time – the hours between 7:00 and 9:00 pm – became a policy in 1975 through the combined efforts of the FCC and the entire television industry. Family Viewing Time has no real definition; it merely suggests that broadcasters set aside these two hours for programs that are appropriate to all age groups. Some production companies, however, and some television executives as well, believe that this policy interferes with their First Amendment rights to free speech and expression.

The *Prime Time Access Rule*, adopted in 1970, is an FCC regulation stating that one of the four hours between 7:00 and 11:00 pm must be opened up to local programming. (Before 1971 when the rule went into effect, the networks controlled all four hours, with their nightly news programs leading directly into their own program schedule.) The networks now air their prime time shows from 8:00 to 11:00 pm eastern standard time, Monday through Saturday, and from 7:00 to 11:00 pm on Sunday.

Many local stations at first reacted negatively to having to fill 7:00 to 8:00 pm with their own shows. They feared a loss of revenue from network advertising during this hour. But most of them discovered that they could make this hour profitable by expanding local news shows (which are fairly inexpensive to produce and which draw relatively large audiences), or by filling in the time with old reruns. The networks, in turn, found they were able to shed a number of unpopular and unprofitable programs. With less time to fill, they were able to spend more money and promotion time on the three remaining nightly hours.

Activity I

In the "Public Interest"

Write down what you believe to be the meaning of the phrase "public interest, convenience, and necessity." Then briefly describe how your local station could best act to fulfill this obligation, as you perceive it. Compare your ideas with your classmates'; and see if as a group you can come up with a public interest policy for your local station.

The "Fourth Network"

PBS

PBS logo.

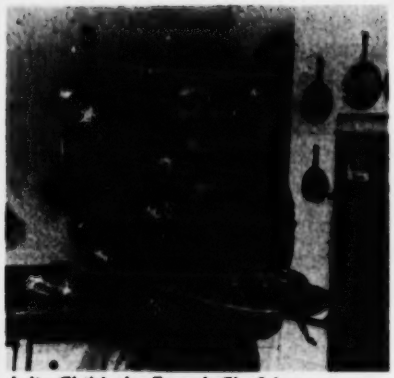
Public television, sometimes called the "fourth network," came into being in this country after commercial television. Unlike commercial television, which is supported by advertising revenue, public television depends for its economic survival upon state and federal funds, grants from corporations and foundations, and voluntary contributions from its viewers. In theory, because it does not have to respond to the demands of advertisers and the commercial marketplace (there are no advertisements as such on public television) it is freed from the burden of ratings wars and can provide the public with a diversity of television programming rich in the best that the medium has to offer.

In practice, public television has been sorely underfinanced. Although it provides us with many fine programs, it is often severely limited by its constant search for funding.

Up until about 1950, both radio and television were seen as strictly commercial enterprises. Except for an ill-fated attempt during the writing of the Communications Act of 1934 to allocate 25 percent of all radio channels to nonprofit organizations, there was little interest in insuring a place for public broadcasting. But in 1950, under the zealous leadership of newly appointed FCC Commissioner Frieda Hennock, a joint committee on educational television was formed which, after two years of squabbling within the industry, resulted in provision for some 242 educational stations to broadcast over VHF and UHF channels. The committee assumed that these stations would be licensed to colleges, universities, state commissions, and nonprofit civic organizations.

In 1967, a report from the Carnegie Commission on Public Broadcasting suggested enlarging the goals of educational television. It recommended the formation of a Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), to act as a distributor of federal funds as well as to oversee the system and protect it from political and governmental interference. These recommendations were written into the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, which redefined the role of public television. In 1969, CPB created the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). While PBS is responsible for transmitting the programs its member stations wish to air, it does not have the authority to make programming decisions for the network as a whole.

From its earliest days, public television has been rife with politics, both from within and without. During the early 1970s, for example, the Nixon administration attempted to change the direction public television was taking. By vetoing a long-term appropriation for the system, the administration made it clear that it wanted the system to emphasize local programming for local audiences, rather than to continue developing as a network. Ironically, the Watergate hearings in 1973 and 1974, which led to President Nixon's resignation, were a major boost for public television. Shown live by day and by tape at night, the hearings attracted large audiences for PBS stations, some of which gained their highest ratings in history.



Julia Child, the French Chef, has been a perennial favorite of public television audiences.

In 1979, a second Carnegie Commission (the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting, also known as "Carnegie II") issued another report on the system. Finding public television's organization "fundamentally flawed" and that there was "little likelihood that public television . . . might consistently achieve programming excellence under the present circumstances," the Commission proposed other ways to finance and run the system, which had now grown to 280 stations.

It recommended that much more money – $1.2 billion annually by 1985 – be allocated to PBS. It has been noted that in 1978 commercial television paid about as much for the rights to football games as the federal government paid to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting – about $150 million. "Carnegie II" also proposed to restructure public television's bureaucracy so that more quality programming could be financed and produced with greater efficiency.

As it now stands, public television is quite different from its profit-making counterparts. Unlike the commercial networks, PBS does not produce any of its own programs, nor does it buy programs from smaller production houses. Instead, it administers the Station Program Cooperative (SPC). This is a system through which member stations vote whether or not to purchase specific programs produced outside their own stations. Once a year, the SPC asks PBS stations that produce their own shows to send in ideas and budgets for shows they wish to offer to PBS as a whole. The SPC then asks its members to vote on the programs they want to support financially. When enough stations vote for a program, the program is considered purchased. When the program is made and ready to be aired, it

is sold to the stations that wanted it for a price that varies according to each station's size (a small public television station would pay less for a show like *Sesame Street* than a large urban station).

See Reading 2.1,
"A National Treasure"

Public television has produced some notable achievements: *The Adams Chronicles; Nova; Live from Lincoln Center; The Scarlet Letter; Sesame Street; The Electric Company.* It has also introduced Americans to some of the finest of British television: *Upstairs, Downstairs; Civilisation; The Ascent of Man; Monty Python's Flying Circus.*

The Business of Television

How does money work in commercial television?

It starts with you, when you buy an advertised product off the market shelf. Suppose you put a box of Corn Snackies cereal costing one dollar into your shopping cart. If Corn Snackies weren't advertised on TV, the box would cost eighty cents. The extra twenty cents is what the Corn Snackies people spend on promoting the product on television.

Corn Snackies is a family cereal – popular with people of all ages in all parts of the country. The company therefore spends its $20 million television advertising budget in support of a wide variety of network programs: children's shows on Saturday morning, family drama and situation comedies during evening prime time, and a game show or two during the late morning. In 1978, an *average* minute of commercial time over the networks cost roughly $40 thousand (the figure is very different for different shows, as we will see). So, with $20 million to spend, the Corn Snackies company can buy 500 minutes of commercial time for the year, or the equivalent of about 1,000 thirty-second commercials.

The television industry is in many ways like any other business. It operates largely on the system of supply and demand. The more demand there is for commercial time on a particular program, the higher the price for use of that time. Advertisers want to reach as many people as possible. Therefore, a very popular show is more attractive to advertisers than a program with few viewers. Accordingly, the price for commercial time is higher for popular shows.

If people were asked how television works as a business, most would probably say that it tries to sell products to viewers through advertising. This statement is true, but it paints a very incomplete picture. In fact, television can better be described as a *business that sells viewers to advertisers.* The more viewers who watch a program, the more money networks can charge for commercial time on that program. (That's why ratings, which we'll get to soon, are so important.)

It follows, then, that the network with the most popular shows is going to make the most money from advertising. The three-way race between ABC, CBS, and NBC to attract the most viewers is not built on pride; it is built on money.

All three networks are owned by stockholders. That is, each one sells shares of its stock to the public. These shares increase or decrease in value depending on two factors: 1) how much confidence shareholders have in the networks as well-managed businesses; and 2) how many viewers the networks are attracting, and therefore how much advertising revenue is coming in. The cost of a share of stock in a network can vary

NBC Photo

NBC president Fred Silverman.

See Reading 2.2,
"In Conversation with Les Brown"

from day to day. If a program on CBS, for example, suddenly starts drawing a large audience, it is likely that CBS stock will increase in value.

Fred Silverman, the well-known television executive who helped put ABC in first place, has worked for all three commercial networks. By the time he had gone from CBS to ABC, he was widely regarded as the most successful program decision maker in television history. In 1978, NBC, which was then in third place, hired him as its president. On the day the announcement was made, the value of a share of NBC stock rose dramatically. Shareholders believed that the hiring of Silverman would bring in programs that would attract more viewers.

How Commercial Time Is Bought and Sold

When Corn Snackies is looking for commercial time on network television, it can choose from a large variety of programs shown at different times of day. Each program draws a different-sized audience, and the cost for airing a thirty-second commercial will vary accordingly. Corn Snackies may wish to advertise during *60 Minutes*, an extremely popular show on Sunday night, and spend a lot of money (about $80 thousand for a thirty-second ad in 1979). Or it may choose to spend less money on a program watched by fewer people – a daytime soap opera, for instance.

There are several ways for a company to buy commercial time. First, the company probably has an *advertising agency* that designs and produces its commercials and acts as the buyer of network time. The agency, of course, charges the Corn Snackies company for these services.

Most likely, Corn Snackies (through its agency) will buy television time quarterly – in three-month blocks. The agency will go to a network, express an interest in doing business, and instruct the network salespeople to get five million dollars' worth of time for those three months. Corn Snackies wants to reach many different kinds of people – children, young parents, older adults. The network will feed this information into its computers and will report to the agency what kinds of time slots are available to Corn Snackies, and at what price. This sort of advertising buying is called a "scatter plan."

Advertising rates vary according to a show's ratings. Network salespeople publish "rate cards," which indicate the various established costs of time on all its programs. A very popular program like *All In The Family*, for instance, might command $40 thousand for a thirty-second ad (1979), based on its recent ratings history. But if Corn Snackies is already spending a lot – say, $5 million – for advertising on one network for three months, its agency might bargain with the network to have that price lowered. The rate card price is useful as a guideline, but it is quite flexible.

Corn Snackies may also go to a *media buyer*. Media buyers are companies that buy up large amounts of commercial television time at a reduced rate, and then sell smaller bits of that time to individual companies and agencies at a profit.

Having sold so much commercial time to Corn Snackies, the network uses much of the $20 million to pay for the programs it buys. Some of these programs are made by the networks themselves. Many others, however, are made by production companies, large and small. The production companies invent ideas for shows, and then try to sell the ideas to the net-

works. If a network likes a particular show idea, it may arrange a "step deal" with the production company: it will pay to see different stages of a program's development – a rough script of one episode, a final script, a pilot program,* and then several episodes. Each step costs more than the one before it.

Some of the major television production companies grew out of the old motion picture studios when they realized that television programs could be very profitable.

In the fall of 1978, Columbia, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, Universal, and Warner Brothers offered twenty-six regularly scheduled prime time programs to fill sixty-six prime time hours per week for three networks. Recently other production houses, often called "independents," have been selling more and more shows to television. In 1978, Norman Lear's TAT/Tandem Productions, Mary Tyler Moore's MTM Enterprises, Lorimar Productions, and Aaron Spelling/Leonard Goldberg each supplied four or more prime time shows to network TV.

Because networks have to spend so much to buy programs from production companies (it has been estimated they may spend as much as $2 billion on programs in 1980), they must choose their programs carefully. Almost without exception, *networks seek programs that will draw the largest possible number of viewers, so those viewers can be sold at the largest possible price to advertisers.*

How do the networks know how many people are watching their programs? It is impossible for them to know *exactly*, but they can get a very close approximation from the services of the A. C. Nielsen Company, which offers a national rating service.

* *pilot program: a single sample episode of a series.*

The Ratings

Although there are other national television ratings services (such as Arbitron), the services offered by Nielsen are the most widely used by the television industry. Program producers, local stations, advertisers, the three networks, and others pay a large amount of money to subscribe to the Nielsen service. They receive rating information daily and bimonthly. The public usually gets this information much later.

Only about one-tenth of what the A. C. Nielsen Company does involves measuring television audiences, but because ratings get so much publicity most people think of Nielsen as only a television ratings company. Their primary rating service – and the one we hear most about – measures the use of television sets in about twelve hundred American homes. Connected to the television sets in these homes, usually somewhere out of sight, is Nielsen's so-called "little black box," the Storage Instantaneous Audimeter (SIA). At one-minute intervals throughout the day the SIA records two pieces of information: 1) is the set on? and 2) to which channel is the set tuned? It does not know if anyone is watching or, when people are watching, how much they enjoy the show.

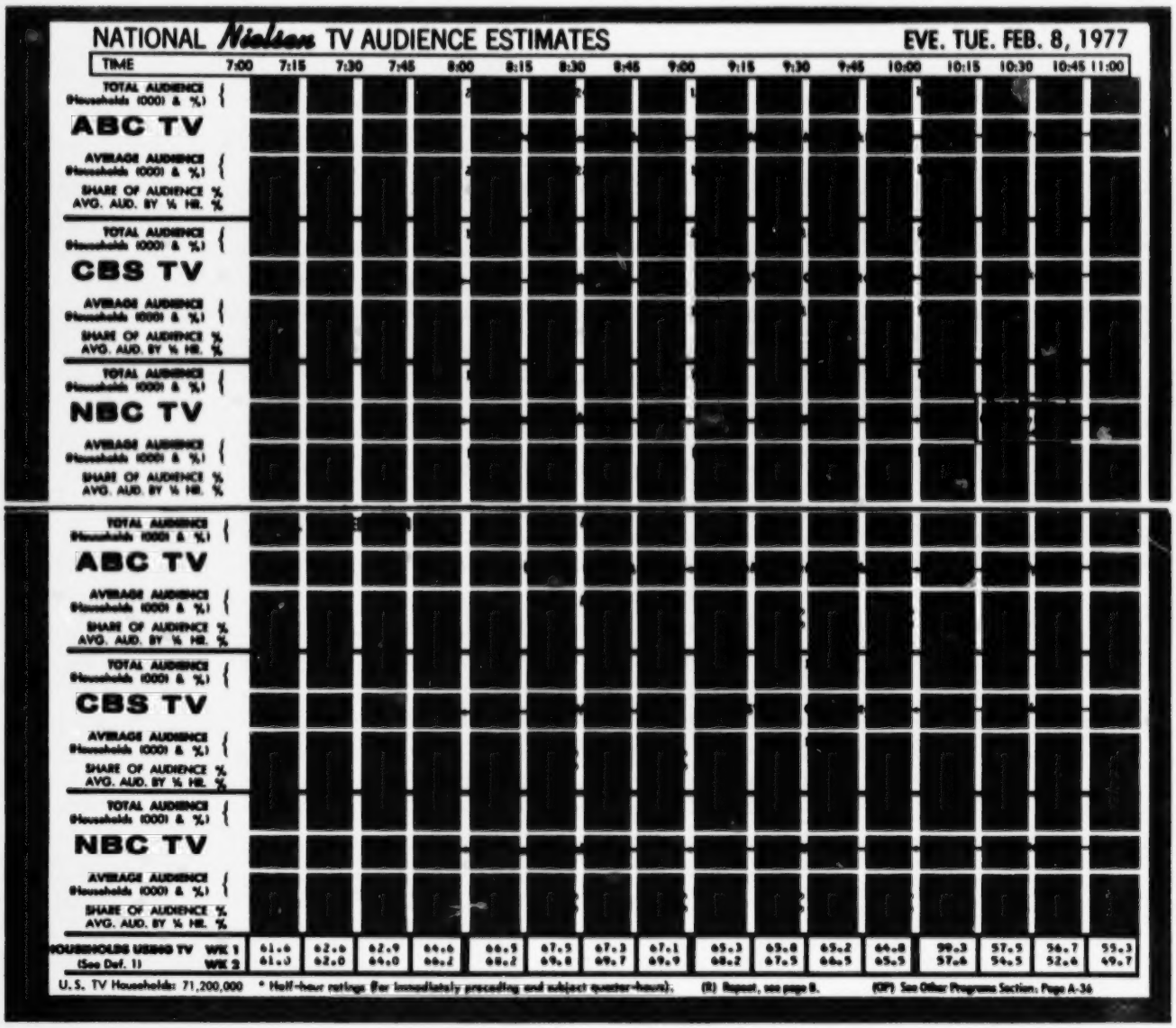
The SIA transmits information every minute over telephone lines to Nielsen's computers in Dunedin, Florida. The information is stored, collated, and then published at two-week intervals.

How can twelve hundred homes accurately represent the seventy-two million homes nationwide that have TV sets? The sampling, of course,

See Reading 2.3,
"Everything You've Always Wanted to Know About TV Ratings . . ."

can't be exact, but it is close enough so that ratings are helpful as a guide. Nielsen claims, as do other polling services, that a sampling of twelve hundred can offer fairly reliable information on the nation as a whole, if these twelve hundred are carefully chosen to represent a true cross section of the public by such factors as age, sex, income, family size, and education. Every year Nielsen removes one-fifth of its SIAs and finds new homes for them, so that a whole new sampling is achieved every five years.

Reprinted below is a sample of the Nielsen National TV Ratings released after the two weeks ending February 20, 1977. The two days shown are Tuesday, February 8, 1977, and Tuesday, February 15, 1977. The hours are prime time: 8:00 to 11:00 pm, eastern standard time.


NATIONAL Nielsen TV AUDIENCE ESTIMATES
EVE. TUE. FEB. 8, 1977
TIME 7:00 7:15 7:30 7:45 8:00 8:15 8:30 8:45 9:00 9:15 9:30 9:45 10:00 10:15 10:30 10:45 11:00
TOTAL AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
ABC TV
AVERAGE AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
SHARE OF AUDIENCE % AVG. AUD. BY ¼ HR. %
TOTAL AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
CBS TV
AVERAGE AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
SHARE OF AUDIENCE % AVG. AUD. BY ¼ HR. %
TOTAL AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
NBC TV
AVERAGE AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
SHARE OF AUDIENCE % AVG. AUD. BY ¼ HR. %
TOTAL AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
ABC TV
AVERAGE AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
SHARE OF AUDIENCE % AVG. AUD. BY ¼ HR. %
TOTAL AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
CBS TV
AVERAGE AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
SHARE OF AUDIENCE % AVG. AUD. BY ¼ HR. %
TOTAL AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
NBC TV
AVERAGE AUDIENCE (Households (000) & %)
SHARE OF AUDIENCE % AVG. AUD. BY ¼ HR. %
HOUSEHOLDS USING TV WK 1 61.0 62.0 62.9 64.0 66.5 68.2 67.5 69.8 67.3 69.7 67.1 69.9 65.3 68.2 65.8 67.9 65.2 66.5 64.8 65.5 59.3 57.6 57.5 56.5 56.7 52.6 55.3 49.7
WK 2 61.0 62.0 64.0 66.2
(See Def. 1)
U. S. TV Households: 71,200,000
* Half-hour ratings (for immediately preceding and subject quarter-hours).
(R) Repeat, see page 8.
(OP) See Other Programs Section: Page A-36

Some of the numbers on this chart are more important than others. For study purposes, ignore the top two rows of figures for each nighttime lineup of network shows. Instead, look at the numbers just beneath each program title; these are the ones most often referred to by network programmers.

For instance, between 8:00 and 8:30 pm on February 8, 1977, ABC-TV aired *Happy Days*, one of the most popular programs of that year. The number of homes tuned in to *Happy Days* (during an average minute) was 22,640,000. That number is equal to 31.8 percent of all the homes in the country that had TV sets in 1977; *31.8 percent is the program's "rating,"* and is circled on this chart.

The number 47 beneath the rating indicates what percentage of television households that had sets on at that time were tuned to that show – in other words, 47 percent of all households with sets on at that time were tuned to *Happy Days*. By any standard, that's a very large share, indicative of the program's appeal to a great many people.

The bottom row of numbers for ABC-TV that evening indicates the average percentage of television households tuned in to *Happy Days* by quarter hours: 30.9 percent were tuned in during the first half of the program, and 32.7 percent were tuned in for the second half. The rating, 31.8 percent, is the average of those two figures.

At the very bottom of the chart, we see the column, "TV HOUSEHOLDS USING TV," with entries for two weeks. When *Happy Days* was on during Week 1, 66.5 percent of TV homes had the set on between 8:00 and 8:15, while 67.5 percent used the set between 8:15 and 8:30.

Add up the *share* (not the rating) figures for *Happy Days* (ABC), *Who's Who* (CBS), and *Baa Baa Black Sheep* (NBC) for Tuesday, February 8. The total, 93 percent, indicates that 7 percent of the TV homes with sets on at that time were tuned in to a station not affiliated with a network – in other words, 7 percent were tuned to an independent or public television station.

Activity 2

Two Tuesdays in February, 1977

During February of each year, the networks have traditionally competed in a special event known as the "ratings sweepstakes," or "the sweeps." The ratings for this period are the basis used by broadcasters to set advertising rates; therefore networks schedule their best programs then to attract the most viewers. It is a time for specials, for big movies, and for especially exciting episodes of regularly scheduled prime time dramatic shows. In 1977 on the two Tuesdays shown on the rating chart, only one special aired: the *Dean Martin Celebrity Roast*, indicated with a box around the title. (The networks decided in that year to leave their regular schedules fairly intact.)

Examine the Nielsen figures on the chart and answer these questions:

1. Which program had the highest rating for the two weeks?
2. Which program had the lowest rating for the two weeks?
3. On February 15, what was the percentage of TV households tuned in to *M*A*S*H* between 9:15 and 9:30 pm?
4. Did the *Dean Martin Celebrity Roast* win the ratings race on February 8?
5. On February 8, during which quarter hour were the most television sets turned on?
6. Which program had less than a 20 percent *share* of the viewing audience for either Tuesday?
7. For the two weeks, which network outperformed the others in drawing the largest audience?

Network advertising salespeople use a Cost Per Thousand (CPM) formula when figuring the rates they should charge sponsors for commercial time. Assume the CPM (the "M" is the Roman numeral for thousand) is five dollars. This means that the advertiser must pay five dollars for every thousand viewing *households* for a one-minute commercial.

On February 15, approximately twenty-five million households were tuned to *Happy Days*. At a CPM of five dollars, an advertiser would therefore have to pay about $125 thousand to air a one-minute commercial, or about $62,500 for a thirty-second commercial. If the advertiser wanted to buy time on *Who's Who*, however, the cost would be far less.

The CPM figure varies when advertisers are seeking more specialized audiences – people whose age, income, education, and sex make them the market desired by the advertiser. Some sponsors offer products (like Corn Snackies cereal) that appeal to a broad market. Others, however, seek specific groups of people as their "targeted" audience. A product like automobile tires, for instance, is seen by advertisers as of interest mostly to men. Snow tires can be seen as appealing to men in northern states. A manufacturer of expensive snow tires would seek a market of northern men in higher income brackets – and so on. When advertisers aim at specialized markets, the CPM is higher than for the general viewing audience – perhaps even double or triple the usual figure.

For most advertisers the desirable general audience is considered to be young adults from eighteen to thirty-four or, as a second choice, adults from eighteen to forty-nine. These are the people who do more buying than any other age group. In the late 1960s, CBS had more affiliate stations in rural and small town areas than either NBC or ABC. CBS was broadcasting a variety of "rural comedy" programs (*Beverly Hillbillies, Petticoat Junction, Green Acres, Mayberry R.F.D.*) which the ratings indicated appealed strongly to people in rural areas, and especially to older people. The shows were doing well – they were attracting large numbers of viewers – but they were not doing so well in drawing the market more advertisers were beginning to want: younger adults in urban and suburban areas. By 1971, CBS had responded to this problem by dropping all rural shows from its prime time schedule in favor of programs that would appeal to viewers aged eighteen to forty-nine.

Even today, a large number of sponsors who sell products to a mass market continue to hunt for the largest number of *all* viewers – the biggest head count – which, as stated above, is available at a lower CPM. And so network programmers continue to search for the kinds of programs that will draw the largest possible share of the audience.

Between the hours of 8:00 and 11:00 pm, when more people watch television than at any other time, the networks serve up the best they have to offer: big-name stars, flashy specials, expensive productions. Prime time is the network's showcase.

But prime time is also prime risk time. If a show is just a few rating points lower than anticipated, the network can lose millions of dollars a year in revenue. For this reason, no network executive will deny that ratings are the most important standard for determining what stays on the air and what doesn't.

To decide what new programs are to get on the air, networks go to great lengths to research what people like and don't like, as Neil Shister described in his article "TV Programming Research" in Judy Fireman's *TV Book: The Ultimate Television Book:*

CBS first began testing radio shows in the 1930s, and now a large part of the third floor at its Manhattan headquarters is taken up by the Viewer Session Room (VSR). Almost every day CBS representatives scour midtown Manhattan inviting people off the street to screen programs and register their opinions. These shows are usually pilots. Inside the VSR the panel sits around a long oval table facing a color television set. Each viewer holds two push buttons: one green and one red, one or the other of which he or she presses continually to register pleasure or displeasure with what is shown. As many as one hundred fifty people will screen a program, and the responses of all the viewers are then collated to produce a wavelike chart, similar to a polygraph, which plots a moment-by-moment summary of the high points and low points of the sampled show.*

ABC and NBC use a Los Angeles-based service, Audience Studies Incorporated (ASI), to test their pilots. The procedure is similar to that pioneered by CBS although different in detail. Told by their network clients what kind of audience (social class and income) to test, ASI finds a suitable sample and invites them to a Sunset Boulevard theater. There the audience sits in seats equipped with a rheostat dial marked "very dull, dull, normal, good, very good" and evaluates the offered program.

How accurate are research results? That is a tightly guarded trade secret which none of the network research vice-presidents is willing to disclose. They do agree, however, that testing can usually identify and weed out likely "bombs." "We're better as a negative than a positive indicator," says NBC research chief William Rubens. Arnold Becker of CBS directs a department of over fifty people, and claims that predictions of how a show will do are accurate about 85 percent of the time. "But," admits Becker candidly, "if it were up to research, All In The Family *would never have gotten on the air." If research is so revealing, why do most new series fail? "Well," says one seasoned veteran of the broadcasting wars, "sometimes what research tells you is that what you got ain't so good, but that it's better than anything else you got."*

* polygraph: a "lie detector."

Scheduling Tactics

Once programs have been selected, whether they're good or not so good they have to be scheduled. Scheduling decisions are made in the spring – long before the new season begins in September – because advertisers want to make their promotional plans as early as possible. From various sources, especially advertising agencies, a network will learn how its competitors are scheduling *their* programs and will adjust its own schedule accordingly.

The right day and the right time are important for a show, as noted by Les Brown in *Television: The Business Behind the Box,* published in 1971:

Sunday, as the family day, naturally has the highest rate of tune-in and the most viewing by all elements of the audience – juveniles, teenagers, young adults, and older people. It is television's best night for business, and very costly to a network that trails in the ratings because the revenue potential is so lush. Viewing levels also tend to be high on Mondays, which perhaps is explained by the American habit of staying home and recharging after the weekend. It is, for some reason, an exceptionally good night for reaching women.

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are the median nights, slightly lower than Mondays in Homes Using Television – the Nielsen term – but delivering the full spectrum of audience, male and female, young and old, moneyed and poor. The problem night is Friday, because of the sharp decline in the desirable mature viewers and the increase in the number of children and older people before the set during the later hours. It is, of course, a going-out night for young adults and teenagers, and a baby-sitter night for television. Saturdays are much the same, but with greater sets-in-use. The juvenile and geriatric audiences have strikingly similar viewing patterns, and they seem to be attracted to the same programs. As the most television-prone members of society, they tend to concentrate their viewing early in the evening, quitting for bed at nine o'clock, except Fridays and Saturdays, when they may stay up later (their sleeping habits are similar, too). Both ends of the age scale are best reached with simple and familiar programs, the game and panel shows, Westerns, situation comedies, animated cartoons, and light variety.

Fridays and Saturdays are difficult nights for experimentation with anything new in programming because the great bimodal [two-part] nucleus of the TV audience on those nights resists newness. Lawrence Welk has hung in year after year as proof. Fridays and Saturdays almost repeat the 7:30 problem all evening long. The quest is for a rating that is sizable, with enough of the choice viewers in the composition to be marketable . . .

Prime time is prime because it is the period of the day in which television viewing is greatest, but within those three and a half hours, audience levels rise, peak, and decline . . . Viewing crests between 8:30 and 9:00 pm and begins to trail off when Granny and the kids go to bed, but what is left in the middle of the evening is the slice of audience the advertiser most desires.

Activity 3

Outprogram the Experts!

Examine the scheduling of prime time shows in your newspaper or *TV Guide* for any week night. Choose any program from any network. Remove it from the schedule. Replace it with a show of your own invention – one which you feel will do as well as, or better than, the one you removed. Give the program's title, the names of its stars, and a brief description of what the show is about. Then explain your reasoning for what you've done.

It is sound business practice for local affiliate stations to carry their network's prime time shows. The latter are offered free, and the money the station gets from the network for airing a particular program – the station compensation – can be as much as twenty to thirty percent of the advertising rates the local station would collect if it broadcast and paid for producing its own program. Most local stations have sharply limited production facilities – studio space, editing equipment, and so on – and usually are not able on their own to make costly or complicated programs. It's easier and less expensive for an affiliate to carry as many network programs as possible; and also, the local station is guaranteed a known amount of income through station compensation.

Syndicated programs are distributed to local stations (both independents and affiliates) by companies that have purchased them from the networks or from production companies. Quite often, these programs are off-network reruns – shows, as you may remember from page 14, that ran their own course for a few years and then were passed on to a syndication company. Other programs become syndicated when the production companies that made them are unable or unwilling to sell them to the networks (*Space: 1999* and *The Muppet Show* are such programs). Still others are the early episodes of current network hits. The first few years of *All In The Family*, for instance, were in syndication in 1979 while new episodes were being aired on CBS prime time television.

Syndicated programs are good business for the local stations because, first, they are relatively inexpensive to buy, and second, they are attractive to advertisers. Former network shows especially, like *I Love Lucy*, *Star Trek*, or *The Beverly Hillbillies*, have had proven audience appeal and are almost guaranteed to achieve good ratings.

See Reading 2.4, "In Conversation with Fred Friendly"

A good program schedule – matching the right kinds of shows to the right kinds of viewers expected to be watching at a given time – is crucial for high ratings, and therefore for advertising dollars. Paul Klein, vice-president in charge of programming at NBC during the mid-to-late 1970s, has contributed a number of words and phrases to the daily speech of television professionals. The ones below all refer to scheduling tactics, the maneuvering of programs to pull in the highest ratings:

Audience flow is the carrying of a viewing audience over from one program to another. For instance, if 80 percent of the people who watch *Happy Days* keep the set tuned in to the same channel, they'll see *Laverne and Shirley* right afterwards [1979]. This would be excellent audience flow.

Block programming is the scheduling of similar kinds of programs one right after another in an effort to create good audience flow. In 1979, ABC's Tuesday night lineup of *Happy Days, Laverne and Shirley, Three's Company,* and *Taxi* was considered very successful block programming. All three networks also have a children's block of cartoons on Saturday mornings.

Blunting occurs when one network tries to "blunt" the appeal of another network's show by putting on a similar kind of program at the same time. For instance, putting a John Wayne cowboy movie up against a well-promoted John Wayne special would blunt the special's appeal.

Bridging is a form of blunting. If a competing network plans a blockbuster movie at 9:00 pm – one that they hope to get high ratings for – you, as a programmer, could *bridge* them by beginning your own big movie at 8:30 in the hope that your audience will stay with you instead of switching to the other network.

Counterprogramming involves putting a show on the air that appeals to an audience that's very different from the one that will watch another network's show in the same time slot. CBS broadcasts *60 Minutes* at 7:00 pm Sundays opposite NBC's *Wonderful World of Disney*. The former show appeals to adults and sophisticated young people. The latter draws an audience of children.

Front-loading occurs during the first weeks of the new fall lineup (September, early October) when each network jams its schedule with big, star-studded movies that will take viewers away from the other networks. It has been shown in the past that if a new series doesn't draw a big audience with its first episode in the fall, its chance of being successful is greatly reduced.

Hammock is a term used to describe a program scheduled between two very popular shows (something "low" slung between two high points). If hour-long shows at 8:00 pm and 10:00 pm have very high ratings, a brand new program can be introduced at 9:00 pm and be assured of a reasonable chance of success due to audience flow.

LOP, as you may remember from Unit I, stands for Least Objectionable Program. Former NBC executive Paul Klein asserts that most viewers aren't really interested in particular programs. Instead, he says, they turn the set on and twist the dial until they find a show that is least offensive to them.

Stripping refers to the practice followed by many local stations of scheduling episodes from the same series for the same time each weekday. This is much cheaper than airing an entirely different program each day. Stripping builds a faithful audience.

If you are a member of what the commercial television industry terms the television "audience," your viewing and buying habits are well known. Programs are conceived, designed, scheduled, promoted, and sponsored with you in mind with the object that you and millions like you will be delivered in huge numbers to advertisers at considerable profit to the commercial networks and stations.

Reading

2.1 *Edwin Diamond, a journalist and critic, is senior lecturer in the Political Science Department at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and has written two books on television news. What strengths and weaknesses of public television does he identify in the following article?*

A National Treasure

by Edwin Diamond
from *Mainliner Magazine*
July 1979

In the late 1960s, that broadcast entity known as "educational television" became something called "public television." The shift was signaled by the passage of legislation to provide federal money to support independent, noncommercial broadcasting.

Federal dollars were supposed to usher in the millennium. Public television was to become the alternative to the vulgarity and triviality and violence – as some critics saw it – of commercial TV. Public television would be free of advertiser control and commercial television's search for the largest audience (so more consumers will see the sponsor's product). Public television would encourage localism and creative talent from all corners of America, as opposed to the control from the twin commercial production centers of New York and Los Angeles. Public television would engage in fearless – but always responsible – journalism and public affairs broadcasting. Finally, although public television had outgrown its earliest roots of instructional TV stations run by universities and state school systems, in its new flowering it would present great artists and master teachers transmitting "hope and access to a better life . . ."

In fact, many good things have happened on public television. *Sesame Street* opened children's –and parents' – eyes to the possibilities of television as teacher as well as baby sitter. The *Forsyte Saga* started the retaking of the American colonies by excellent British television drama. The homegrown *Great American Dream Machine* managed to be, at once, lively, chaotic, intelligent – perhaps the most exasperating magazine show in the short history of television. Some of its investigative pieces live on in CBS's highly acclaimed *60 Minutes*.

Established performers appeared in new formats, such as the actress Liv Ullman in Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes From A Marriage*. A galaxy of new stars, and unlikely stars, shined first on public television: Julia Child and her inspired cookery; Louis Rukeyser of *Wall Street Week*, television's first charismatic economics expert; the zaniness of *Monty Python* and the subtleties of Professor J. Bronowski and Sir Kenneth Clark on *Ascent of Man* and *Civilisation*

Public television was at the Watergate hearings. PTV's *Newsroom* local news format in San Francisco, Dallas and Pittsburgh showed that TV journalists could look and sound like ordinary human beings and could deliver clear, intelligent news reports without happy-talk banter. *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report* offered an alternative to the network news headline services by concentrating on just one story each night. The public stations in New York and Los Angeles, still those twin poles of creative energy, provided a new stage for the performing arts – public television's *Dance in America* and *Visions* and *Skyline* series. New York also gave public television Bill Moyers and his *Journal*, while Buffalo produced the equally valuable Mark Russell. In Boston and New York, strong leadership built public television with wide community support and acceptance. Looking at the public television – and public radio – record over the last twelve years, the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting concluded earlier this year that public broadcasting was "a national treasure." But the commission also added that the public TV treasure was "fundamentally flawed . . . [and] badly in need of repair."

It is, of course, the nature of commission reports to praise and to blame. The establishment figures who sit on such study commissions are usually friendly to the establishment figures they are studying; still, changes must be recommended, or else why conduct the study in the first place? The Carnegie Commission report, however, had the virtue of definitively confirming the impressions of anyone who had casually followed public television in the newspapers or on the screen. Despite its acknowledged triumphs, public television at the start of 1979 had serious financial, administrative, creative and identity problems.

First of all, what the government giveth, it can taketh away. The Nixon Administration, as the Carnegie report underlines, didn't like public television. The White House thought PTV's public affairs programming was too liberal, which might have been taken to mean too anti-administration. In 1972, at the bottom of public television's fortunes, President Nixon vetoed the Congressional authorization bill for public broadcasting. PTV officials realized that the federal lifeline could also be a noose. A second authorization was eventually approved, but with public funding tight, the various public broadcasting entities had to scramble for fast-shrinking dollars. An alphabet soup of broadcasting bureaucracies – CPB, PBS, NET, NPACT, NPR – jostled each other for money and power. These backstage feudal wars, fascinating to those involved, meant little to the home viewer.

The public television audience could only see the hard results on the air: the disappearance of public affairs documentaries that might ruffle establishment feathers, creeping commercialism in the form of institutional advertising (as in the line, "This program made possible by a grant from . . ."), over-reliance on British dramatic imports at a time when American artists were seeking work and exposure; and, overall, the feeling that public television programming was playing it safe rather than risking the experimentation, initiative and leadership that was implied in the 1960s idea of alternative noncommercial broadcasting. At times the public television schedule – with prime-time Hollywood musical films, frequent interruptions for fund-raising pitches and fluff like Ned Sherrin's *We Interrupt This Week* – began to look indistinguishable from its commercial channel mates.

The Carnegie Commission's solution to public television's problems was both earnest and predictable. The Carnegie report called for 1) more money for public television, 2) a reorganization of the feuding bureaucracies and 3) programs of "excellence, diversity and substance." One and two were to add up to make three.

At present public television across

the nation is funded at about $482 million annually. Some $135 million of this comes from federal funds; the rest is from state and local appropriations, viewer contributions, foundation grants and the corporate "underwriters." By 1985, the Carnegie report proposes, public television should have a budget of $1.2 billion annually, with approximately half of that sum coming from the federal government. Most of this money, Carnegie says, should go to the individual public stations to be used as Public Service Grants – that is, funds to produce better programs, locally, regionally or nationally through the pooling of station efforts and money.

If I had to guess, I would say that the Congress and the Carter Administration will in general go along with the commission's recommendations despite the current cost-conscious mood in Washington. Actually, it works as much the other way: the Carnegie Commission members put forward ideas that already had taken hold among the influential congressional committees that oversee public broadcasting. While that's safe, it's also effective. The bill for public television won't be cheap – a billion here, a billion there, and it all adds up, the late Senator Everett Dirksen once observed. But as federal projects go, the public broadcasting bill is not exorbitant. Ten years of federal support for public broadcasting will just about equal the cost of building and fitting out one nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.

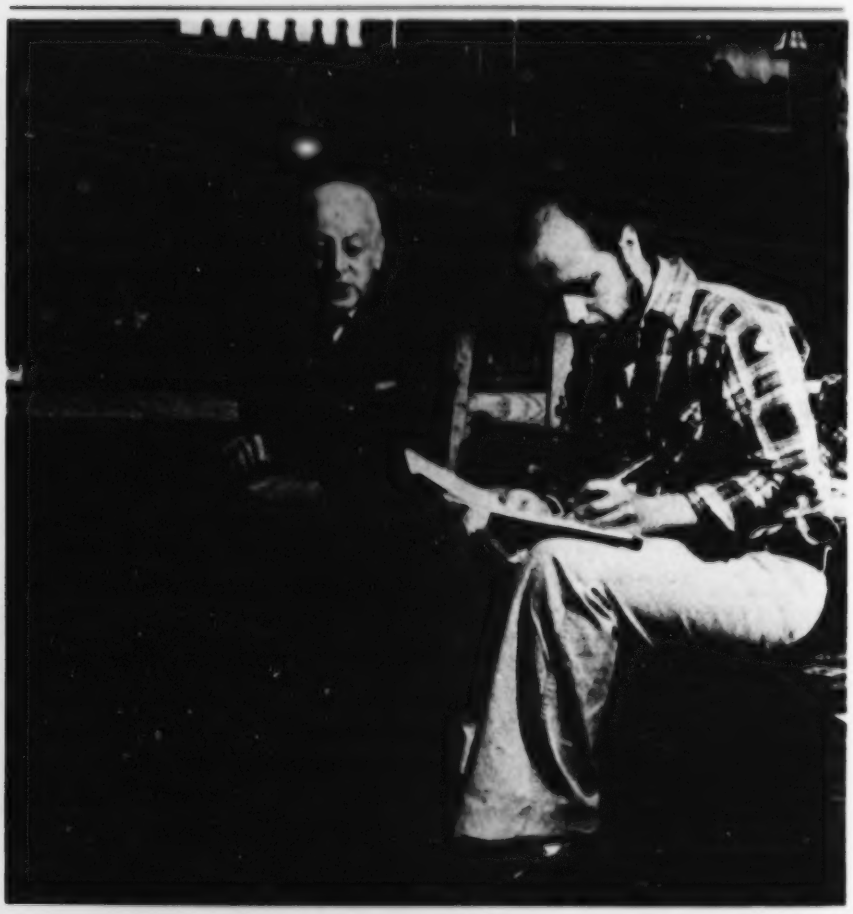
Public television has to resolve the competing claims of access and control. If public television is to be truly public, then some ways must be found to provide entry to air time for individuals and groups other than those certifiably "professional" or "acceptable" or "respectable." Often, today's outrageous or avant garde art forms – and today's political heresies – are tomorrow's received truths.

An equally serious issue centers on access of a different sort. The public television channels are still awash with Made-in-England imports from the BBC and other British producers – *Masterpiece Theatre* and *The Shakespeare Plays*, just to name two. As good as these programs may be, they do more than give an unnecessarily British accent to quality public television. They also drive American artists and producers out of business, or over to commercial television seeking new assignments.

The Carnegie Commission unfairly put down commercial television in its zeal to praise public television. But broadcasting is not a zero sum game; it is not necessary for one side to be damned in order that the other side be praised. In point of fact, there is ample entertainment and enlightenment for any reasonable viewer. Certainly there is drivel, chewing gum for the eyes, but there is also more and more choice. Commercial television doesn't greedily pursue the numbers to the exclusion of quality and thought, any more than public broadcasting loftily ignores large audiences in favor of elitist programming. The television channels can no longer be divided into the good guys and the bad guys, like some early 1960s TV western. Programs can be good *and* popular – like CBS's *60 Minutes* and public broadcasting's *Great Performances*. The true national treasure exists all across the dial, to be extracted at our leisure.

True, public television probably can never achieve the mass audience appeal of the teenybopper comedy on the commercial dial – shows like *Mork and Mindy*, *Happy Days*, and *Laverne and Shirley*. But the size of the audience is not the only way to measure acceptance. A few weeks ago, the nonprofit National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting completed a pilot test of an alternative ratings system for television, a way to judge programs that goes beyond simple head-counting. NCCB set up a "quality index" that asked viewers to rank programs on the basis of their importance and enjoyment. The results brightened the reading of PTV executives. While ABC's *Happy Days* scored third-highest in number of viewers, for example, on the "quality index" it rated number twenty-seven. But while public television's *I, Claudius* ranked well down at 46 in the Nielsen ratings, it achieved number one rating on the QI.

An achievement like that means more than all the fine words of distinguished commissions.



Alistair Cooke host for PBS's Masterpiece Theatre, *chats with producer Joan Wilson and director Russell Fortier before taping of his introductory remarks in the studios of Boston's WGBH.*

2.2 In Conversation with Les Brown

Les Brown, television reporter for the New York Times, is perhaps the leading television journalist in the country. His job is not to write criticism of specific programs, but to report on events within the industry itself. What does Les Brown tell us about the relationship between television and the audience?

"In the Service of the Audience . . ."

After reading your book, Television: The Business Behind the Box, *we find there's a lot more going on behind the scenes than the programming on our screens. Television, it seems, is a business before it is anything else. What should we know about it? Is that important to our everyday viewing?*

I think it is because you're being dealt with cynically and you might as well know that. There's another reason too – I've covered this business for twenty-five years now, and more and more I realize its importance: television is more than just an entertainment machine or a news-dispensing machine. It really is a kind of government. I call it "The Government of Leisure" and it's a very big part in our lives and, in a sense, governs a lot of the leisure time of young people – governs how they will be entertained, diverted, informed. And does it for reasons that it's well to understand, or well to be aware of, just as it's important to understand your own government. For example, if the newspapers covered the federal government as badly as they cover television, the whole system of government would have grown up differently, and would have turned into a grotesque pretzel. Also, television has an economic system that is a fascinating one and (should be) important to people who watch television because people are the merchandise. It's well for them to understand that too, that they're being played like chips.

Look at the whole shape of television. We take things for granted when we watch it; we say, well, that's the way it is. But that's not the way it necessarily is, or has to be. For example, if you start with what the Communications Act of 1934 intended, there would have been a very different system from what now exists. But because people never really paid any attention to the fact that there was a public-interest standard, television was allowed to grow in ways to serve the industry's own economic interests. Documentaries, for example, play on television in bunches during the Christmas and New Year's week.

That hasn't changed from the situation you recounted in your book?

That has not changed. The only thing that's changed (since 1971) is that "black week" no longer exists. But the tradition of "black week" – the week when the ratings take a holiday, and therefore when the networks dump all their documentaries – is still carried on. It's no longer "black week" because there is a rating, but it's the period of lowest viewing during the year.

There are other things too, like the scheduling maneuvers that have nothing to do with the convenience of the viewer, or the best interest of the viewer, or the comfort of the viewer. NBC tries to get a new series launched called *Diff 'rent Strokes* and ABC tries to destroy it before it starts. ABC moves programs out of their normal time sequence to go up against that new program to keep it from getting an audience. That kind of cynicism, that kind of playing around, really has to do with a contest between the networks for millions of dollars, and very little to do with service to the public.

It sounds like there isn't much hope for people who want to change television or at least want to change what the networks feed them.

The public was always supposed to be part of the television equation – the whole broadcast equation. The Communications Act of 1934 made it clear that instead of having a national system – as Britain did with the BBC – we were to have one based on the principle of localism. There would be lots of local stations to provide lots of local service, and these stations were to operate in "the public interest, convenience, and necessity." The Supreme Court several times has made it plain that stations were not ever to delegate their responsibility, not to a network and not to anybody else – and yet they do.

That seems to happen because of the economic imperative of the network giant.

Yes. And also because of the kind of power and clout that a network has. In fact, for the stations, that's good business. There's money in it. If there weren't money in it, they wouldn't be doing it. So they're really serving their own economic interests all the time.

What are some of the things we should understand about the economics of television?

I'll preface this by saying that there are two ways of looking at the public. The networks and the stations always say they're serving the public because they are popular with the public. But what they're talking about is the audience, and the audience is not the same as the public. A predictable number of people are watching television every hour of the evening. They know that. I said that in my book. They know that there will be seventy million watching at seven o'clock, eighty million at eight o'clock, and one hundred ten million at nine o'clock, on Sunday nights for example, which has the largest tune-in of the week. Well, that's a hundred and ten million people watching at nine o'clock, and there are two hundred twenty million people in the country, which tells you that half the country is not watching. The half that are watching are the audience, but the whole two hundred twenty million is the public, and television is responsible to *all* of them.

So, there are heavy users of television, and there are people who are selective about what they watch. Public broadcasting has very few heavy users. They have selective viewers. That's one of the reasons why their audiences can't be predicted. But because it has become a good business to do this, commercial television has concentrated on that audience of heavy users and in effect said nuts to anyone else; if they want to watch it, they can. That's where they're playing the game. The three networks are all playing essentially for the heavy users. That's who the programs are created for. That puts them in the service of the audience but not in the service of the public.

They also respond to the consensus of the advertising industry, and the advertising industry is interested in reaching

young adults, eighteen to forty-nine, so that's who most of the programs are geared for. Now the same is true in radio and in local television. Everybody's playing to reach the eighteen to forty-nine-year-old audience because you get more advertising at higher prices when you get that audience. That disenfranchises the elderly, and very young children, although they are invited to watch and will watch, because they are heavy users of television. In effect, what the networks say is that they're not going to do anything especially designed to fit the needs and interests of special groups, but they are certainly invited to sit down and watch *Starsky and Hutch* like everybody else. That's the attitude, and that's part of the cynicism that goes into it.

You hear talk about three networks providing a diversity of services: "It's more than one, it's more than two, and therefore it's diversity." In fact, it's three networks providing the same service in triplicate. They all do the same thing. It's virtually impossible to distinguish among them. They're really very similar. They buy their programs from the same sources, and they provide the same kinds of service. They provide it in *their* interest, not in the public interest.

What is this concept "the public interest"?

People would have trouble defining that. It's really an enabling phrase, deliberately abstruse. But I think you can tell the difference between the public and the audience and make that distinction. WLBT lost its license in Jackson, Mississippi, during the sixties for failing to serve the interests of the black community, for actually discriminating against them and not allowing the civil rights point of view to be heard on that station. This was an instance of the courts establishing very clearly that a station was not serving the interest of the entire public, and trying to exclude a part of the audience. But the concept of public interest is a difficult one, and hard to describe to a high school group in some kind of shorthand.

In light of all this, what more should we be aware of in looking at television? How else are we being treated cynically?

Well, they are trying to manipulate the audience. When there are a hundred and ten million people to work with at nine pm, or eighty million people to work with at another hour of the night, those numbers are always going to be there, as sort of a fixed audience. The game is how to carve it up, how to get the most, the largest share of the audience.

How do they know what the audience really wants?

They don't know what the audience wants, that's why twenty-two shows went under this year already. It's really not a matter of what the audience *wants*, anyway. It's a matter of what the audience will *watch*. You can do all kinds of studies and find out what they want, put it on, and then ABC will put *Mork and Mindy* on against it and wipe you out. It's like three-handed chess. I don't know if that's the perfect analogy, but it's like a big board game: they do move pieces around and when somebody hits on something that works, and succeeds, you begin to see others copying it, very quickly. There may be two or three *Mork and Mindys* next fall. If something works, and people are manifestly interested in it, then that's something the networks know about. You ask how they know what the people want – that's one way they know. And then they try to give it to the audience until the people can't stand it. It's a lot easier to program when you're imitating something than when you try to do something fresh. There's a series that's successful called *Love Boat* so somebody tried something the other day called *Pleasure Cove*. These are all attempts to jump in on something. But that's not a new story, that's an old story. Movies have done it for years too.

Are there any new stories in television?

The only thing that's going to change television now is technology. This system is really past dismantling. It's just too important to a lot of people who are on the receiving end. It has a lot of fuel and is operating under terrific power. But the new technology is starting to happen.

Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

The stars of 60 Minutes, clockwise from bottom: Mike Wallace, Morley Safer, Dan Rather, Harry Reasoner.

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Within ten years it may be a whole new kind of television.

What are you thinking of – home video equipment?

Less that, because I see that the home video stuff, cassettes and discs – if there is a market for those things – will mostly interest the people who are selective viewers now. There will still be an awful lot of people who like the programming set for them by the networks, and who are very happy to take what comes down the pipe on any night.

People buy records but they still listen to the radio. Playing records is a different kind of activity from listening to the radio, even though it seems to achieve the same thing. You're still listening to music. Technology made a huge difference for FM. Until there was stereo, FM was a medium people didn't know about, or care about. It was struggling and nothing was happening. Rock buffs, however, really liked stereo, and so when FM gave up classical music and went to rock, the combination with stereo made it a big medium. Now it's competitive with AM radio, and they are on virtually equal footing. In television, similarly, something may happen to create new stations and new networks. It may be the pay mode. In fact, I think it is. An awful lot of people are very anxious to have cable television so that they can have the Home Box Office [HBO] channel and other pay services.

What is Home Box Office [HBO]?

HBO is a pay television channel. It brings in new movies, sports events, nightclub acts and the like without commercials. A small revolution has to take place before these changes occur: that is, people have to get used to the idea of paying for television some of the time. Then there's that business going on in Columbus, Ohio, with the QUBE system.* QUBE is a dazzling new kind of television system that involves ten channels of pay, ten channels of over-the-air television, and ten channels of new specialized programming: an all-children's channel, an all-sports channel, an all-religion channel, that sort of thing. Very expensive to build. It has a two-way capacity. People can send responses back.

We don't know whether that's going to work as a business, but if it does then that's the way it will grow, and rapidly. Lots of big companies will buy cable systems and install them because it can throw off an awful lot of money, which is what they're interested in. So that's one possibility. Then there's the satellites and the fact that the satellite distributes programming to cable systems and new kinds of programming can go out over the satellite. The combination of satellites and cable makes possible whole new kinds of networks, whole new television configurations that will vie for audiences and break the lockstep of the three networks.

How far down the road do you see all this?

Well, it's already here, so we're not talking about something far off in the future. The change may occur in two or three years, as soon as there is enough cable or as soon as there's a thirty percent penetration of cable in the country. When that happens, then cable becomes a national advertising medium. That was the crucial point for commercial television and color television. When they reached thirty percent, they became mass media. Cable is being built so rapidly that in the next three years it might reach that thirty percent penetration.

Let's switch tacks. Do you know any examples of courageous programming, where programming ignored the business end?

Well, *60 Minutes* would be one. I hesitate to call any of this courageous. This is stuff they should have been doing anyway. But CBS has always operated on a philosophy that while they would make money and have profitable commercial programs everywhere, they would always try to reserve some little part of the schedule for something decent. A number of years ago they put *60 Minutes* in prime time, and the darn thing was just awful in the ratings, running up against entertainment shows. NBC tried to put something like that together called *First Tuesday*, but NBC was cowardly and put *First Tuesday* up against *60 Minutes*, so those two programs would compete with each other. But when NBC's show took a big shellacking in the ratings, they pulled out. But CBS stayed with it, kept *60 Minutes* going all these years, and now it's a hit show. So there's a reward for doing that. That was a courageous thing in a relative sense, I suppose, but I don't like to speak of it as being courageous.

60 Minutes almost died. What happened?

It was in prime time. They took it out of prime time. They stuck it in at six o'clock on Sunday, and that's where it started to find its audience, because it was up against local programs around the country. Then they moved it to seven o'clock on Sunday when the Prime Time Access Rule was revised, and now it's a hit there. But it's a hit because it can only compete with children's programming – that's all that's allowed to play in that time period under the rules: only children's programming and public affairs can play from seven o'clock to eight o'clock on Sunday, or the networks have to give the time up to the local stations.

It seems that a show like 60 Minutes needs nurturing and time to find its audience, but the economics of television doesn't allow that.

No, it doesn't. If CBS had not been the leading network all those years, *60 Minutes* wouldn't have stayed on. As a matter of fact, it started to catch on just about the time that CBS was losing its lead. That's why they kept it, because it was a successful show by then. But ABC's the number one network and they don't have anything going like that; *20/20* plays once a month.

What about on public television?

I don't think it knows what it is yet, and probably never will. It resists any kind of central authority and therefore has created a huge clumsy bureaucracy with a limited ability to make things happen. What they make happen is usually very nice because it's noncommercial, but . . . I don't see under the present structure that it will ever become a nationally important second force in broadcasting. It's an important force. There are a lot of people who like it, and who like television because of it . . . that still makes for a very small audience. I'm talking of a second force that would rub against the commercial broadcasting system the way independent systems rub against the BBC in Britain and the noncommercial broadcasters rub against the

* *See Reading 7.1, "QUBE"*

NHK in Japan . . . [It's] a very healthy kind of arrangement, two systems, one commercial and one public, equally large and strong. It works in other countries. It doesn't work here because our public television is weak.

How would you create that second important force?

It would be a public television system that was centralized and used programs that were national, three hours during the day and three hours at night, with the rest given to local programming. It would be one that would be fed by all the various production centers it now has, but would have to be a central authority which said, "Okay, WGBH, we want this show from you, and WNET, we'll take that one from you." But that's not how it is now. Now it's a patchwork, a free-for-all. It's no threat at all to commercial television.

2.3 *Your favorite television program has been cancelled because of low Nielsen ratings. Then you read in this book that Nielsen uses a sample of only twelve hundred homes to acquire its ratings. If you're like most people, your natural instinct would be to feel angry with the Nielsen Company. If you were to write them demanding an explanation, you would receive their booklet, "Everything You've Always Wanted to Know About TV Ratings . . ." which is reprinted here in part.*

Everything You've Always Wanted to Know About TV Ratings (But Were Maybe Too Skeptical to Ask)

by A. C. Nielsen Company

"W-h-a-a-t . . . Do you mean to say that with only 1,200 homes . . . ?"

Certain questions – such as "Mommie, can I have a cookie?" – are obviously asked very often, but surely this question about our sample size would win the prize for frequency by a wide margin.

Most people seem to feel that a sample of 1,200 households may be adequate for a city of perhaps 100,000 – but that a sample many times as large would be needed for a nation of 76 million TV households. This sounds logical, but it's wrong. Try the interesting experiment [below] and you'll see why . . .

Imagine 100,000 beads in a washtub; 30,000 red and 70,000 white. Mix thoroughly, then scoop out a sample of 1,000. Even before counting, you'll know that not all beads in your sample are red. Nor would you expect your sample to divide exactly at 300 red and 700 white.

As a matter of fact, the mathematical odds are about 20 to 1 that the count of red beads will be between 270 and 330 – or about 27% to 33% of the sample . . .

These basic sampling laws wouldn't change even if you drew your sample of 1,000 from 76 million beads instead of 100,000 – assuming that the 76 million beads had the same ratio of red and white.

This is a simple demonstration of why a sample of 1,000 is just as adequate for a nation of 76 million households as for a city of 100,000.

The real question should be: *"Does a 1,200-household sample provide a sufficiently reliable estimate of the national TV audience?"* We could answer this by pointing out that the TV industry considers the sample adequate. (By "TV industry" we mean the advertisers and their agencies, networks, TV stations, program producers, etc.). But, we can also answer the question in a little more direct way.

Again, without going into the intricacies of mathematical statistics (maybe you'll take our word for it, or you could ask a statistician), the following is factually true:

If the Nielsen sample, constructed as it is, produces a rating of 20% for a number of programs, the TRUE rating lies somewhere between 18.7 and 21.3 for two out of three programs.

Most people agree that this is a rather small margin of error. But then, logically, many will say: "Aha . . . but what about the 1 in 3 times when the error might be larger?" They have forgotten that TV ratings are measured and remeasured throughout the entire year. Rarely would a programming decision be made on just one ratings report; repeated measurements substantially reduce the range of statistical error that applies, as well as provide broadcasters with a vital sense of direction as to whether an audience is building or dropping off . . .

"How do you know what programs people are watching in the sample households?"

The answer is simple – but it is based on an extraordinarily complex system of electronic data transmission and data processing.

The heart of this system is the Nielsen-designed Storage Instantaneous Audimeter (SIA). Smaller than a cigar box, the SIA is placed in each sample household, out of sight and out of mind, where it is interconnected with up to four TV sets. (If a home has more than four sets, we install a second SIA.) With its computer-like memory, the SIA automatically stores information – at one-minute intervals – showing whether each set is on or off, and if on, to which channel it is tuned. (The minute-by-minute feature, even taken alone, provides valuable insight on people's programming likes and dislikes.)

The next step, of course, is to "retrieve" data stored in the SIA. This is done via a special telephone line connected to each sample household. (Even sample households with no regular telephone have their own SIA line.) Then, our computer periodically "interrogates" the SIA unit in each household. Typically, a full day's viewing information on up to four sets is automatically retrieved by Nielsen's Central Office Computer – in five seconds.

In effect, the channel selection knob on each set in each sample household is "wired in" to Nielsen computers so that we can determine exactly how those knobs are switched around, minute-by-minute over a 24-hour period. There is no guess-work – no memory – involved.

"Granting that your meter shows the set is 'on': How can it measure who is watching . . . or if anyone is watching at all?"

It can't – and so we have developed a separate sample of National Audience Composition (NAC) households. Members of the NAC sample keep diaries: entering what programs were watched and which members of the family were in the audience. Since each family in the sample provides us with demographic information on such things as age and sex of family members, we are able to provide reliable profiles of the audiences for various programs.

The second part of the question was, of course, asked when our metered system was first introduced. Many thousands of dollars were spent on repeated telephone surveys to find the answer – and briefly, it is this. During daytime hours about 4% of the TV sets are on with no one viewing. The figure drops to 2% during prime evening time. In short, the numbers are insignificant.

"How do I become a member of the Nielsen sample?"

Strictly through chance – and your chance is roughly 1 in 60 thousand. A few words of explanation. Naturally we'd like to accommodate people who offer to be in our sample – but doing so would violate basic laws of sampling practice. In a way, this would be like picking out more red beads because they are prettier or easier to see. The sample would immediately become biased.

Instead, we carefully draw our sample in a way that offers *every U.S. television household an equal chance of being selected.* And this is considerably more complicated than it sounds . . .

"How does Nielsen measure local audiences . . . say, in Pittsburgh or Little Rock?"

Since there are over 200 local TV markets, which require a total of nearly 100,000 sample households, obviously the cost of a metered system is prohibitive – except in four large markets –New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco. In the others, we ask cooperating households to keep a television viewing diary for one week. After processing, the information is released in reports for each market. Aside from this difference, the same statistical laws and sampling principles apply in making these periodic local measurements.

2.4 In Conversation with Fred Friendly

Fred Friendly, recently a television consultant to the Ford Foundation, began a career in broadcasting by teaming up with Edward R. Murrow at CBS to produce See It Now during the 1950s. Later he became president of CBS News (1964-1966), and a staunch supporter of expanded news and public affairs programming. What does Friendly mean when he says, "Television is a business, period"?

"Talking Wallpaper?"

Is television a business before it's anything else?

Television is a business, period. There's a line in my book [*Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control . . .*] where William Paley says, "I suppose the mistake we made was in ever going public." This was the biggest mistake – that's what's at the bottom of all this.

Can you explain that a little bit more?

It's quite simple. The people who buy stock buy part of the company, whether it's a meat company, an automobile company, or a broadcasting company. They are investing their money to get a return on it. People on Wall Street are convinced that the stock of the network with the biggest rating will sell for the most money; it's bad if you're in third place, even though you have millions and millions of people watching. You've got to be in *first* place. If you're not in first place, then you get rid of the current management. Even though NBC, which is now in third place [1978], is making more money than it has ever made before, it isn't making as much money as ABC. So the management at NBC changed. Fred Silverman, who got a lot of popular shows on ABC, is now at NBC trying to bring that kind of mediocrity to NBC. He will be a success if he can get enough mediocrity on the air, to get enough people to watch so that NBC stock, the RCA stock, goes up. It's madness. There's no sense to it. We're the only country in the world that has worked it out this way. It's symptomatic of the sickness in our society.

Let's talk for a moment about ratings. What do they show us and who are the networks serving?

They're serving numbers.

What's numbers?

That's a good question. As you drive along any of the main roads of Tucson, or Oklahoma City, or Miami, you will see McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Sambo's, Arthur Treacher, and so on. Who goes to those places? Obviously all kinds of people go to them or they wouldn't be there. Television has identified these people in the same way. There is a similarity between the people who eat fast food and those who watch television – who are content to sit down and be exposed to *talking wallpaper*. I don't even think they watch it very carefully. I can't prove this but my sense is this: they turn it on, leave it on, are exposed to the commercials (like those blinking neon signs that say Sambo's or Fried Chicken or Big Mac). They just see it, and that's what television is about. I believe that most of the restaurants on those highways in Tucson, Oklahoma City, and Boston are programmed for just those people who will drive into those places. But that means there are a great many people who are so frustrated by commercial television that they watch public television or read a book, or don't do anything at all. And that's a terrible sadness. The leadership group, the intellectual population, those who are better educated and should be the leading television viewers, are now escaping from it. It's all backwards.

How do we give viewers the tools to appreciate television?

Teach them to be consumers! It's valuable to teach people about television; to say "Don't be manipulated, be a person, be as discriminating about what you watch as about what you eat." It's interesting to me that those young people who are interested in the environment, who don't eat bad food, with chemicals and nitrites and all that, end up watching all that crap on television! TV is being programmed for the lower quadrant or two of the population, the bottom fifty percent. And that's okay with me. They ought to be able to watch television, but *not* to the exclusion of the other fifty percent who have been deserted.

What about changing the ratings system? You're interested in qualitative ratings. How would they help?*

Everybody agrees that a qualitative rating system *in addition* to the Nielsen ratings would be good. Designing the system is going to be much tougher. Fortunately, it's not going to require any new gadgets. I'm not interested in gadgets. People have all kinds of gadgets. The way to do it is, first, figure out the demographics of who watches, just the way we did on election night at CBS and NBC: the makeup of the people who vote. How many Greek Orthodox? How many Catholics? How many Protestants? How many high school graduates? How many college graduates? Who did they all vote for? Second, you need to know the intensity with which people watch, the way the eyes look at things. I *think* you can measure that. I have no doubt that people watch a program like *Holocaust* or a very good documentary, or a good drama, with far more intensity than they watch *Charlie's Angels*, or *Starsky and Hutch*, or all that stuff. Advertisers ought to know that and society ought to know that. So we've given some professionals the job of designing the model upon which you can make those kinds of measurements. I think advertisers would be interested in that; I think stations ought to be interested in that because if they're not, in the end they're going to be left with Times Square. There was a day when Times Square tried to maximize the rent and the intake for every possible foot. Times Square has turned itself into one big, gaudy midway which nobody wants to go to anymore. That's what will happen to television. I think it behooves television people to find out if they want the highest possible audience and the highest possible return for every minute of the day, or if they want to build something which will endure. The short-term buck is easy to make, but you end up with Coney Island, or Revere Beach. The long-term thing is to try to preserve something.

What's your view of television these days? Its past? Its future?

I think that television once felt that it was something more than a money machine, once felt that it had to program for all of society, not just for those whom they could get into their "circus tent" every night for three hours. It lost sight of that because I think the business management people, and Wall Street, conditioned them to maximize their profits. Not for the year, but for every hour of the day. Television people have forgotten who they are and where they are going. They have to be reminded of that. The FCC would remind them of that. I'm not for a lot of FCC regulation, but I am for the right of the FCC to make the networks keep their promises. They all promised, voluntarily, to operate in "the public interest, convenience, and necessity." They haven't. They've operated in the interest of making a buck. Period. They've welched on their bets, and people who welch on their promises usually don't get their loan renewed. I'm all for people making money. Harvard, the Ford Foundation, others – they all need a fair return on their investment. But we're seeing the whole thing turned into a glittering midway which makes a mockery out of everything. I noticed a piece in the *New York Times* the other day saying that even the program-makers, the Hollywood people who have profited most by the system, are beginning to say, "The ratings are driving us *crazy*."

Has TV really changed, or has it just found its own voice as the voice of mediocrity?

It could have been anything it wanted. What happened was that the business schools of the country taught television how to institutionalize its greed. Up until 1957, radio and television believed that they were franchised in "the public interest, convenience, and necessity," as the FCC said. This was something very special and you had a responsibility. You could make money, but first you had to do your job. Then suddenly, the business schools and the management consultant firms convinced broadcasters that they should treat every fifteen-minute segment as if it were a piece of real estate on Route 128, or on Broadway, or Times Square, and that it should get the largest possible return for every fifteen-minute period. Once you convinced the broadcasters of that – and they were quite ready to be convinced of it – there was no stopping it. It meant that if you had a rating of fifteen, you had to have a rating of twenty. One exception proves the rule. There is a program called *The Paper Chase* with John Houseman. That stays on in spite of its ratings, which are certainly high enough to keep it on, in any decent society. William Paley happens to be quite taken with that program, so the program stays on.* But nine-tenths of the schedule ought to be there because the network says, "That's a good program; the American people would be better off for having seen that program; it's uplifting, it's stimulating." Instead, all decisions are based on ratings. You can have the best program on the air, and if it doesn't have a good rating it will be off the air. And that's a scandal.

* *qualitative ratings: various ways of determining not how many people are watching a program, but how much they like it.*

* *A few months after this interview, CBS cancelled* The Paper Chase.

Times Square, New York City.

Kristy McNichol and James Broderick of ABC's Family.
The Spelling-Goldberg production has been a critical and ratings success.

Unit 3 Programs and Production

The limitations of [a dramatic show like] Family are quite simply that no matter what problem you present, it has to be reconciled and resolved within an hour. This is necessarily unrealistic. In life, problems are not always resolved and conflicts aren't always reconciled – certainly not within an hour. This is the single most unrealistic part of any kind of [dramatic show].

What we try to do is give our characters room for growth – not from A to Z, but from A to B . . . You can't have a character in a series go through quantum leaps of maturity every single week. Otherwise, at the end of a twenty-six-week season, he would have evolved to the awareness of a Buddhist master.

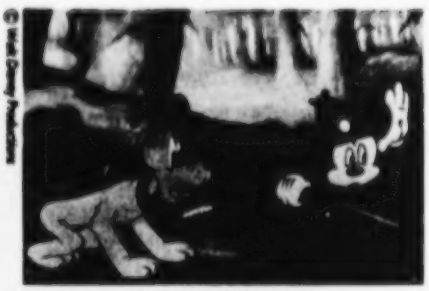
– Ed Zwick*

* *from an interview January 9, 1979. Ed Zwick was Story Editor for ABC's Family at that time.*

Dramatic programming accounts for approximately 80 percent of what you'll see on network television during prime time. Consider these Nielsen statistics for 1977:

- On an average January night at 9:00 pm, the TV was on in 70 percent of the nation's homes.
- Although prime time accounts for only 13 percent of the week's viewing hours, Americans devote about 35 percent of their viewing to prime time programs.
- Of the fifteen most popular shows for teenagers in 1977, only one (*Donny and Marie*) was a nondramatic program, and it placed fifteenth. All fourteen dramatic shows were aired during prime time.

Drama has always been with us, ever since the first people told stories of their exploits by drawing pictures on the walls of caves. In the broadest sense, dramatic works include the epic poems of Homer, the plays of Aristophanes and Shakespeare, the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, the novels of Hemingway, the cartoons of Walt Disney, and the TV comedies of Norman Lear. All dramatic works, whatever form they take, tell a story. Stories can teach us lessons; make us happy, sad, angry, or afraid; educate us to the ways of the real world; offer us escape into worlds that never were or worlds that are yet to be. All stories are peopled with characters, though they can be of various kinds, familiar or strange: Viking warlords, garage mechanics, bionic athletes, next-door neighbors, spaceship commanders, road runners, rabbits, and coyotes.



© Walt Disney Productions

The face on the right is the most widely known in the world. But we must still "suspend our disbelief" to enjoy his adventures.

Almost without exception, dramatic works are identical in asking us to do something before we become part of the audience: that we pretend. If we cannot pretend, we will mistakenly assume that what we are about to see (or hear or read) is real, or we will be profoundly disappointed when we see unreal things happening.

Because we know that what we see in a dramatic work is not real, we must adjust our thinking in order to enjoy the show and become involved with it. This adjustment is called the *willing suspension of disbelief.*

Mice don't talk. They don't wear clothes. They don't drive cars, chew gum, or do laundry. And yet Mickey Mouse is more familiar than any other character, human or animal, to people throughout the whole world. The millions of people who have seen a Mickey Mouse cartoon willingly

suspended their disbelief that a mouse could have human characteristics. Once people adjust their thinking in this way, they can relax, pretend, and enjoy the show.

Activity 1

Roots of Drama

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hanna-Barbera's *The Flintstones*, and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* are all dramatic works. So are Aesop's fables, the poem "The Night Before Christmas," and the movie *Star Wars*.

Make a list of those elements which these works – or five others that you know better – have in common – in what ways they all may be considered dramatic and what their common elements are. Then make a list of the ways in which they differ. Compare your lists with your classmates'. Do most of you share the same ideas? If not, what might be some reasons why you differ?

Plot

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Conflict on screen: All in The Family's Edith Bunker (Jean Stapleton) is confronted by a psychopath (played by David Dukes) in a controversial episode of this legendary series. Conflict here is immediate and physical, "good" vs. "bad."

In a dramatic work the important things that happen comprise the *plot*. And in order for anything important to happen, a dramatic work needs to present *conflict*. Conflict may be extremely simple (Coyote wants to eat Road Runner; Road Runner wants to escape from Coyote), or quite elaborate (as in a soap opera or a serious play).

Conflict may be physical and visible – a fistfight or a car chase. Or it may be internal, except in key moments: a son who is having trouble in school is jealous of his father's success in his career.

Traditionally, most plots are divided into three basic parts. In the beginning, we meet the main characters and learn about the story's main conflict. In the middle, the conflict is more fully developed and described. In the end, usually, the conflict is resolved.

Consider this example from a drama featuring a poor Midwestern family at the turn of the century.

Gifts

1. Introduction of Conflict

Christmas is approaching for the Sloan family – John, Ellen, and their sixteen-year-old daughter, Sally. The farm has done poorly; floods and then drought have ruined much of the crop. Ellen has been able to make a little money tutoring, but hardly enough for household expenses. Young Sally has been training her pony, Buckshot, for the State Horse Trials in hopes of winning a cash prize. John must hold down a nighttime factory job in addition to his farm work just to keep the bank from foreclosing the mortgage. The outlook for exchanging any presents this Christmas is bleak (Ellen needs a new ice box, and Sally could use a new saddle for Buckshot). But the Sloans are tough-spirited and approach the holiday cheerfully.

2. Conflict Develops

From the stairs Sally overhears her parents talking one evening. They are despairing over their inability to buy gifts. An ice box is out of the question. Any meaningful gift for Sally – a new dress, a riding outfit, the saddle she wants – seems beyond their means.

Sally returns upstairs, goes to bed, and lies awake thinking. John leaves for his factory job in town, and we see Ellen reading a sales circular featuring tack equipment: saddles, bridles, and so forth. Thoughtfully, she fingers her pearl necklace – her only valuable possession.

On the day before Christmas we see Sally riding into town to talk to an appliance dealer. In another part of town we see Ellen walking into the village tack shop, her hand clutching her necklace.

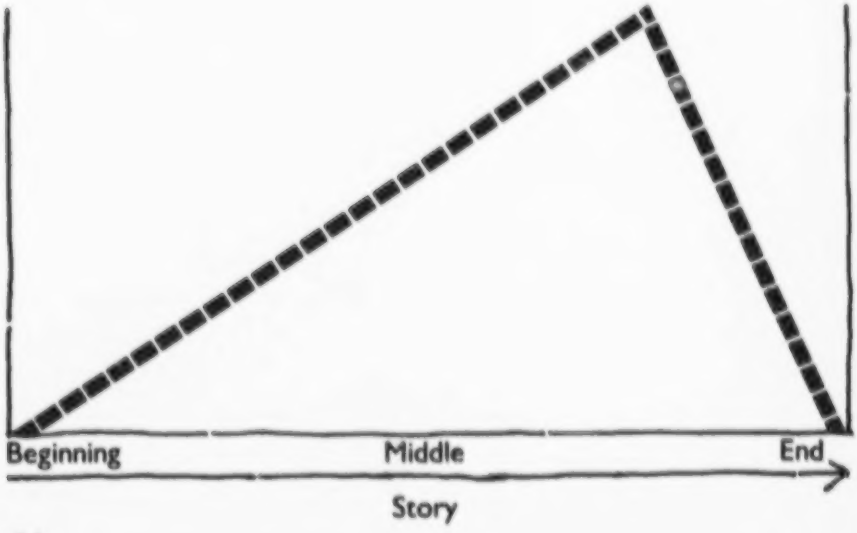
3. Climax and Resolution

It is Christmas morning, and to everyone's surprise there are three sizable packages beneath the tree. Sally opens hers: a new saddle. She bursts into tears and hugs her parents. John opens his – a new pair of workboots –and Ellen pries open the crate that holds her new ice box. At first there is mass confusion, but the story is pieced together and our suspicions are confirmed that Sally sold Buckshot to buy her mother the ice box, and Ellen sold her necklace to buy a new saddle for her daughter. Joy and sadness are oddly mixed. It is only when John announces a special "invisible" Christmas present that the Sloans' Christmas becomes their best of all: his factory job, along with favorable market prices, has secured him a new line of credit at the bank. Not only is the farm rescued from foreclosure, but there is enough money to buy Buckshot back for Sally.

Notice that the conflicts at work in "Gifts" develop and intensify through the story until Sally and her mother Ellen act out their decisions by going into town to trade away their most valued possessions. The final scene, on Christmas morning, is the *climax*, or high point, of the story: we witness the elements that will bring the conflicts to a point of *resolution*, when the gifts are opened and each family member explains his or her contribution to the family's Christmas. Through their actions rather than their words, the Sloans come to understand each other better.

A graph can illustrate plot development in a dramatic work of this kind. In the graph below, the rising and falling line indicates the level of *dramatic tension* (which is the result of conflict) as the story progresses.

Level of Dramatic Tension

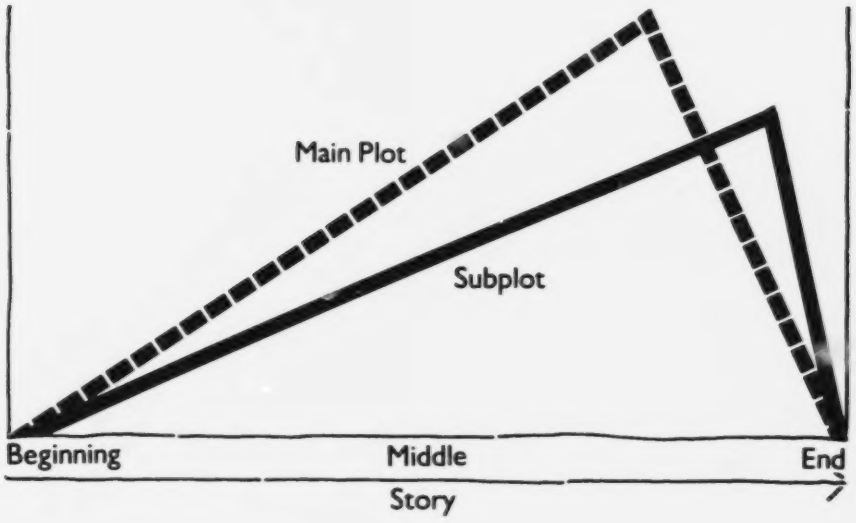


As the conflict becomes more pronounced, the level of dramatic tension rises until it reaches a climax. It is clear from the graph, however, that the story doesn't end when dramatic tension is at its height. Instead, as writers of plays, fiction, and television have known for years, it is important that the audience (or reader) be given a chance to relax for a short while after the climax. This brief space is also the time for all unfinished business –the story's loose ends – to be taken care of – often referred to as the *denouement.*

Television programs are primarily visual, lending themselves to fast pacing and action. Even so, one plot sometimes just isn't enough to make even a half-hour dramatic program interesting to all members of its audience. The main plots of most dramatic works can be adequately told, although without much interest, in three or four minutes. But when you add *subplots* – and perhaps also add complications to the main plot – you have a more exciting story. That's vital in a visual medium like television because it provides more opportunities for action, and can also interest more people. Suppose in "Gifts" we add a boyfriend for Sally, providing the opportunity for a subplot; perhaps he wants to marry her and she wants to go to college. And suppose we add a related complication – one that will affect both the main plot and the subplot: Sally must win the cash prize at the state horse fair with Buckshot in order to go to college. Right away you can see the opportunity for more action – an argument between Sally and her boyfriend, perhaps – and also the possibility of an expanded audience: people who will be drawn to a love story as well as those who like family drama.

A subplot, then, is separate from and not as important as the story's main plot, but it is effective in broadening the scope of the story to include other events and perhaps other characters as well. On the graph below, the subplot is shown by a bold line:

Level of Dramatic Tension



Although on this graph the subplot's climax occurs immediately after the climax of the main plot, it may, in fact, occur before as well. There could also be more than one subplot. *Adam-12*, a police show recently in syndication, picked up the old *Dragnet* formula of intertwining three or four separate plots that are unrelated to each other. *Barney Miller*, a very popular prime time situation comedy of the late 1970s, also has a multiplot structure that is in itself a fine vehicle for humor: the 12th Precinct Station House, always on the verge of chaos, provides numerous characters and situations for additional plots.

* *storyboard: a series of sketches or pictures which summarize a story's plot.*

Below is a storyboard* series showing fourteen scenes from a 1956 episode of *Lassie*, entitled "The Challenge," with pieces of the show's script. *Lassie* enjoyed wide popularity on television for more than fifteen years, with changing casts and settings. The episode represented below is from the first series, starring Tommy Rettig, Jan Clayton, and George Cleveland. The fourteen scenes pictured offer the more important parts of the plot development in this episode.

Lassie

"The Challenge" *(episode 5617)*

JEFF: Tommy Rettig
ELLEN: Jan Clayton
GRAMPS: George Cleveland
PORKY: Donald Keeler

1.

WOODY: I think you're chicken!
PORKY: You're not scared, are ya, Jeff?
JEFF: I took his dare, didn't I?

2.

PORKY: He had to do it, Mrs. Miller, Woody double-dared him!
ELLEN: Is this all you can find to do?
JEFF: If you don't take a dare, you're a sissy. If you don't take a double dare, you're a coward.
ELLEN: The next time that something like this comes up, I want you to promise me that you'll stop and think. Now will you?
(Jeff nods silently)

3.

PORKY (off camera): You know what's going to happen in school tomorrow? Woody's gonna make you live up to that double dare!
JEFF: Woody can't make me do anything! I made a promise.

4.

WOODY: (hiding Jeff's report card at top of pole) I double dare you to come and get it . . . Let's see you get out of it without your mother around!
JEFF: I don't have to take your dare.

5.

ELLEN: Jeff, what are you talking about?
JEFF: I'm talking about my report card. Woody grabbed it from me. Then he put it on top of a telephone pole, and then he dared me to get it. But I didn't, because I promised you I wouldn't!

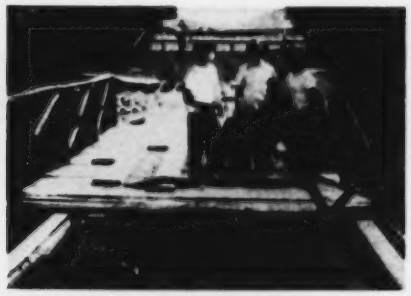
6.

GRAMPS: (after telephoning sheriff Clay Horton about a damaged bridge): Everybody's lightin' on Clay for that bridge bein' out down there at the inlet . . .

7.

JEFF: I should never have made that promise . . . everybody at school's double-daring me and making fun of me!

8.

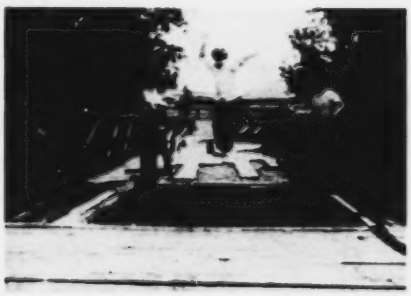


JEFF: You see that gap in the bridge? I dare you to jump it!
WOODY: Darers go first.
JEFF: All right, *I'll* jump it.
PORKY: Jeff, you can't. You'll break your neck!

9.

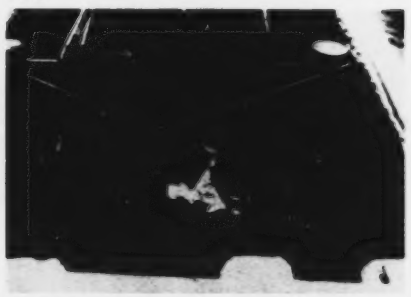
JEFF: Lassie, leave me alone!
PORKY: She's got more sense than you, Jeff.
JEFF: You're a big help, Porky.

10.



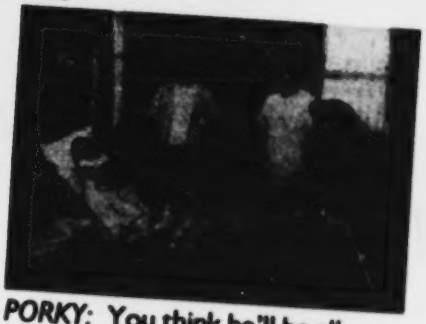
(Jeff tries to leap gap in bridge)

11.



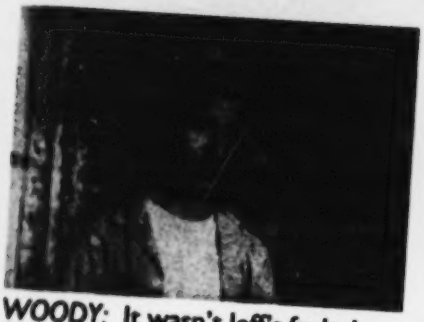
(Jeff has fallen on rocks below)
PORKY: He hit his head!

12.



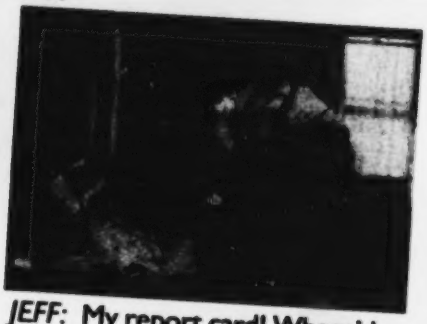
PORKY: You think he'll be all right, Mrs. Miller?
ELLEN: Oh, I think a day or two in bed and he'll be just fine.

13.



WOODY: It wasn't Jeff's fault. It was mine. I'll never dare anyone to do anything again.

14.



JEFF: My report card! Where'd you get it, Gramps?
GRAMPS: Woody gave it to me. Said he forgot to tell you but he got it down a while back.
ELLEN: I think you grew up a little today, Jeff. And Woody did, too.

Many people who study literature believe that in the hundreds of thousands of dramatic works ever created – movies, television shows, plays, novels, stories, poems, and even paintings on cavern walls – there are only three basic conflict situations forming the foundation of the story:

1. A character is in conflict with another person.
2. A character is in conflict with himself or herself.
3. A character is in conflict with his or her surroundings.

All plots, however complicated they may seem, can be reduced to these three conflict situations. Some stories rely heavily on only one of them; others use a combination of two or of all three.

The simplest TV action/adventure stories base their plots on the ancient struggle between good and evil: the police vs. a criminal; the western lawman vs. a bank robber; the heroic spaceship commander vs. evil aliens. These stories present only conflicts between people. On more complex shows, we see characters who face difficult choices involving ethics and values. However, because television can't show the full workings of the human mind, these conflicts are usually shown in a very simplified form.

The most complicated moment in the *Lassie* episode above is when Jeff makes up his mind to jump the gap in the bridge. We suspect that he decides to jump partly to show Woody that he isn't "chicken" and partly to follow through on the honor code that says "darers go first." But what about his hesitation? Is he thinking about the promise he made to his mother? Could he have unspoken fears? We have to use our imaginations to guess at the more complicated workings of his mind!

Activity 2

Conflict

From the *Lassie* storyboard, try to determine if Jeff's conflict is mainly:

- with another person, or
- with himself, or
- with his surroundings,

and offer reasons for your opinion.

Television Dramatic Form

Writers of stories, plays, movie screenplays, and television scripts usually confine their work to certain traditional lengths.

Writers of television dramatic programs generally work with a form similar to that used by playwrights: they usually divide each show into *acts*. In a typical half-hour dramatic program on television, a cluster of commercials interrupts the show at about its midpoint. In the hour-long program, there will be three of these interruptions – at approximately fifteen, thirty, and forty-five minutes into the show.

These breaks encourage the writer to stick to a two- or four-act structure, each act ending with a commercial interruption. The writer must also try to keep the action suspenseful so the audience won't switch channels during the commercials.

The television writer must work quickly. The typical television drama is written and produced within a matter of several days, broadcast once, and then forgotten as new episodes are made. There is little opportunity for laboring over characterizations or dialogue, or for making major changes. The writer's task is to create a complete story that can be told in just an hour or half-hour and that will maintain the viewer's interest. Such a task requires an understanding that:

Television shortens time. A story in "real time" may continue off and on for several days, weeks, or even years. In "television time," the important parts of the story are arranged into scenes, and then further divided into camera shots. These are then pieced together through the editing process into a half-hour or hour presentation. A lot of "real time," therefore, is left out.

Television condenses space. If, for example, a script calls for its teenaged characters to leave their home and go to an amusement park ten miles away to meet friends, the camera, to condense both time and space, would probably show only their departure and arrival; it wouldn't show them driving all the way to the park. Another way in which television condenses space is to limit the action to one place. The set for *All In The Family* features Archie Bunker's living room, kitchen, and parts of his upstairs and front porch. All the action in the story must "fit" into these few spaces – inside or just outside Archie's house.

Television selects its stories. The restrictions of time and space, combined with the need for rapid development of conflict, for visual excitement, and for humor (in comedy), impose limits on the kinds of stories television is able to tell.

Television edits people. Characters on television, as well as in movies and on the stage, must conform to the requirements of the plot. On television especially, we see only bits and pieces of people; there isn't time on television for characters to say or do things that don't move the story forward in some way.

In recent years, *The Waltons* has been a very successful dramatic program. Based upon the recollections of its creator, Earl Hamner, Jr., the show presents the adventures of a large family in rural Virginia during the 1930s and 1940s, as seen through the eyes of the oldest son, John-Boy. In the script segment below, we see the very beginning of the episode "The First Day," the story of John-Boy's leaving home to go to college. At the beginning, we hear Earl Hamner speaking as the grown-up John-Boy, in voice over (v.o.).* The voice-over narration gives us some essential information and helps create an appropriate mood before the story actually begins.

* *voice over (v.o.): narration in a film or television program spoken by someone who does not appear on camera at the time.*

The Waltons

"The First Day"

ACT ONE
Fade in:*

* *fade in: the gradual appearance of a shot.*

1. *Ext.* Walton's Mountain – day*
It is dawn – the first gray light – and there's the suggestion of autumnal crispness in the air, the first blush of fall colors in the underbrush.
JOHN-BOY (v.o.)
(as a man)
When you're growing up, Septembers have a special feeling. Another carefree summer is too quickly ended and a new school year is about to begin.

* *ext. (exterior): a script term meaning that the scene described is in the out-of-doors.*

2. *Ext. Walton house & yard – day*
In the dawnlight, we make out the faintly yellow glow of a lamp burning in John-Boy's room.
JOHN-BOY (v.o.)
(as a man)
There was an extra excitement for me in the September of 1935. My years at Miss Hunter's school on Walton's Mountain were over, and I was ready to take those first faltering steps into the strange world outside.

3. *Int.* John & Olivia's room – day*
(In the dim light, we see OLIVIA lying beside JOHN, who appears to be asleep.)
JOHN-BOY (v.o)
(as a man)
How vividly I recall the edgy excitement, the awful exhilaration of preparation for my first day at college.
(Olivia reacts to a muffled bumping sound.)

* *int. (interior): a script term meaning that the scene described is inside a building.*

Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.
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Scene from The Waltons *episode, "The First Day." John-Boy (left, played by Richard Thomas) enters Boatwright College as a freshman, and meets his English professor (Lawrence Dobkin). This successful CBS series began in 1972. Thomas left the cast in 1977.*

JOHN-BOY (v.o.)
(as a man)
A day which showed me how little I knew about some things . . .
(Olivia begins to get up. John reaches out and stops her. She looks at him, surprised. She didn't know he was awake.)
JOHN-BOY (v.o.)
(continuing; as a man)
. . . and how well my parents had prepared me for others.
(Olivia kisses John and reaches for her bathrobe.)
JOHN
Where are you going?
(We hear the muffled sound again, coming from John-Boy's room.)
OLIVIA
John-Boy's up.
JOHN
I hear. I guess he's anxious to get going.
OLIVIA
It's so early . . . maybe he doesn't feel well, or something.
JOHN
I think he feels fine . . . probably feels the same way we do.
OLIVIA
How's that?
JOHN
Nervous . . . a little scared.
OLIVIA
You want to go in and talk to him?
JOHN
Yeah. But you do too, and I don't think we all oughta go walking in there . . . as if he was starting kindergarten . . . instead of starting college, like he is.
(He kisses Olivia.)
JOHN
(continuing)
Go on . . . you go.
(She smiles at him, draws her robe on, and moves softly out of the room. John watches her go. He gets up and moves to the dresser. He catches sight of himself in the mirror.)
JOHN
(continuing)
. . . starting college . . . your son.
(He nods at himself.)

4. Int. Upstairs hall – day
(Olivia knocks lightly on John-Boy's door. After a moment, the door opens, revealing John-Boy fully dressed in his graduation outfit. He steps back and Olivia moves into his room.)

5. Int. John-Boy's room – day

OLIVIA

*(sotto)**

What in the world are you doing up and dressed at this hour?

JOHN-BOY

I was too excited to sleep.

(He shuts the door as Olivia moves over to his bed. It is made and on the spread lie the various cards, papers, schedules, pencils, pens – all the paraphernalia John-Boy must take with him for his First Day.)

* sotto *is short for* sotto voce, *meaning softly.*

"The First Day" by John McGreevey – "The Waltons."
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In keeping with the lazy mood of an early autumn morning, the dialogue between the parents John and Olivia is soft and slow-paced; to those who are familiar with the Walton characters it probably seems to be natural and spontaneous. And yet even in the first minute or two of this program the scriptwriter is feeding us certain factual information which, through the words of John and Olivia, is important in introducing the plot.

Activity 3

For Our Ears Only

In the script segment from *The Waltons*, can you locate the words or phrases spoken by John and Olivia which seem to be there primarily to give the viewer necessary factual information but which are otherwise unnecessary? Write them down.

Factual information, whether in a short story, television show, or newspaper editorial, is called *exposition*. In *The Waltons*, it is important that we know that it is September 1935, that John-Boy is about to head off to college, and that he feels "edgy" and "exhilarated." These elements of exposition are passed on to us by the narrator, Earl Hamner, Jr., portraying the adult John-Boy in voice-over narration. Some of the exposition appears again in the dialogue between the parents. On television, we can either see exposition (for example, a close-up shot of a September 1935 calendar) or hear it (from the characters' voices), but we can't read it as if in a book.

In comic books and comic strips, the characters speak in "balloons" which are crammed with the exposition we need to understand the story's plot.

AND YOU'LL PAY FOR THAT!
SNAP
SO WILL YOU SWEET-LIPS, UNLESS I CAN PRY LOOSE THE LIQUID OXYGEN FAST!
MAYBE I CAN'T DISCONNECT THE COMPUTER, BUT I CAN FREEZE IT USING THE LIQUID OXYGEN GAS.
AT ALMOST 200° BELOW ZERO THE WHOLE BLAMED THING SHOULD SHATTER TO ICY SHARDS!

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Activity 4

Playing with Exposition in Dialogue

Choose any one of the dramatic situations briefly described below as if it were to appear on television. Try to parody – exaggerate and make fun of – the technique of including a lot of exposition in the dialogue of the characters.

1. A family about to leave on a vacation to the seashore.
2. A young musician auditioning for a part in a successful rock group.
3. Two fellow detectives looking for clues at the scene of a crime.
4. Network programmers meeting to discuss the rescheduling of a program.
5. Students getting ready to take a big test.
6. Make up one of your own.

For example (for # 1 above):

JOHN

(Rushing to the car with water skis slung over shoulder) Oh, I forgot my tennis racket, which I'll need because there are *plenty of tennis courts near our summer house on the ocean.*

NORMA

That's right. And I shouldn't forget to bring my *camera* either, because even if we're only going to be there *two weeks* before we come home it's always good to have pictures.

FATHER

You may be there longer than two weeks, but the one thing I don't like about *my job as a criminal lawyer* is that it gives me so little opportunity to do the things I want, like *swimming*, or *sailing* in our *32-foot sloop, Tricia,* which is the family's pride and joy.

MOTHER

I just hope our *loose exhaust pipe* doesn't fall off on the way. I wish you'd let me fix it, John – after all, *I did take that car repair course!*

When you've finished writing and rewriting your scripts, see if you and your classmates can come up with two or three general rules for writing television exposition. Be conscious of the exposition in the next TV dramatic show you see and rate it *Good, Fair,* or *Poor* depending on how well it communicates the necessary information naturally.

The Characters within a Story

The need for characters to provide exposition to the television audience is a prime example of how television can affect the way characters are portrayed. In general, dramatic form on television insists that characters operate according to certain rules. No matter how "realistic" a dramatic program may appear to be, the plot determines the way characters behave.

First broadcast in 1976, *Family* became very popular with both the viewing audience and the critics as a dramatic program of quality. The show is about a well-to-do suburban family coping with a variety of personal and social problems. Critics have noted that the characters – the six members of the Lawrence family – are well portrayed in that they have

complex personalities and depth. In other words, they seem more "real" than characters from many other shows.

See Reading 3.1, "In Conversation with Ed Zwick"

Still, as the show's story editor Ed Zwick has explained, the Lawrence family must conform to certain standards. Within an hour – because they are a television family – the problems they face must be established, developed, and resolved. The characters themselves must behave the way we expect them to. At the end of the hour, we as viewers must have a sense that the story's main characters have gained added knowledge or understanding of themselves, of each other, and of the outside world. If not, we would probably expect to see the words printed at the end of the show *To be continued . . .*

Writers of dramatic television programs are experts at inventing and solving problems in a short space of time. Whether on *Family, Mork and Mindy, Lou Grant, The Rockford Files,* or *Wonder Woman,* conflict situations are introduced, intensified, and finally solved before the last commercial break: the bad guys are brought to justice, the teenaged boy has learned to cope with his parents' authority, the fire is put out, the bills have been paid.

Activity 5

Solving Problems: In Life, in Television

The two conflict situations described here are of the kind we would expect to see dramatized on a show like *Family,* where important personal and social problems are sometimes handled. Select the one that interests you.

1. Jill, trying to fall asleep, hears her parents arguing downstairs. Recently this has become a familiar scene to her. Her fears that her parents are not getting along have hardened into a deep and painful torment: that they will break up, go separate ways, and compete for her love. The arguing below turns to angry shouts – about what, she cannot tell. Perhaps it is money (her mother *does* seem extravagant from time to time); perhaps it is her father's late hours at the insurance company. Or perhaps it is something she doesn't know about.

Downstairs, something crashes: glass, or china, shattering. Jill sits bolt upright in bed.

2. It is a warm Friday night in summer, and Sharon has called Tom to break her date with him. He hasn't expected this – he feels somewhat bewildered, a little angry – but he has known Sharon long enough to trust her and know she must have a good reason. She has a twin brother, Gary, to whom she is very close, but who has been getting into more and more trouble lately. A drug habit, alcohol – Sharon won't say.

Tom goes out for a late walk. Most people have gone home; the shops are closing. Out of the corner of his eye he sees some commotion at Marcy's Drug Store down the street. He sees someone running out, hears angry shouts. Then the glint of light off what seems to be a knife blade catches his eye and he sees the back of a football jersey disappearing around a corner – Number 19. It is Gary.

In the paper the next morning, the story: YOUTH WIELDS KNIFE, MARCY'S ROBBED OF $800. POLICE BAFFLED.

In this exercise, you are to write two versions of the story you choose. First, complete the story as you imagine it would appear on television. Second, complete the story as you imagine it would happen in real life. In your television version, remember that the central problems must be solved by the end. In the real-life version, we know that doesn't have to happen.

See Reading 3.2, "Characterization in Star Trek"

You may wish to write the two versions of your story in the summary form (as presented above), or you might want to continue them as short stories.

For your television version, use what you've learned so far to create a typical dramatic program. Confine your story to a period of two weeks or less "real time," and condense that time period into a half-hour show.

In the real-life version, you may use any time period you wish. Be prepared to explain how and why the two versions are different.

Production: Film and Tape

Michael Landon, star of Little House on the Prairie *(and a former star of the long-running* Bonanza*) is also a film director. Here he lines up a shot with a 35 mm Panaflex camera for a* Little House *episode.*

Generally speaking, production refers to the making of a program from the first tentative ideas to the final recording of the "master" tape or film (the one you'll finally see on the television set). Along the way, hundreds of people will become involved, and thousands – even hundreds of thousands – of dollars will be spent on salaries and expenses.

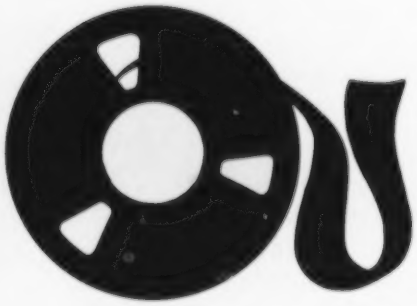
In theory, anyone who has the right equipment and who can bring together the right people can produce a show: a network, a big production company like Universal or MGM, an independent company like Norman Lear's TAT, a local station, or even a few creative people in their own back yards.

Up until the late 1950s, television programs were produced either live or on film. But when quality videotape equipment became available in 1956, the television industry quickly saw how this new equipment would affect production. Shows that were broadcast live presented obvious risks: actors forgetting their lines, a piece of scenery crashing to the stage. If recorded on magnetic tape, however, programs could be edited (pieced together) to insure perfection. Rarely now do we see a *live* dramatic or entertainment program other than news, sports, and special events.

As videotape equipment became less expensive, easier to operate, and better in quality, it began to compete with film as the most efficient way to produce a program. And yet the two are so different that producers have to consider a variety of technical, aesthetic, and cost factors in choosing between them.

In recent years, video technology has become much more sophisticated and efficient. Editing of videotaped programs is done by computer. Taping outdoors – on location – is now much more easily accomplished because of modern, small, lightweight cameras of high quality. The producer or director is able to inspect what has just been taped simply by playing the tape back through a monitor.

Despite these innovations, videotape is not preferred for all television production. Decisions as to whether to use videotape or film are often based on aesthetic grounds: which format will have the *look* that is most suitable to the program we are going to make? Bob Shanks, an executive for ABC-TV, offers his thoughts from his book, *The Cool Fire: How to Make It in Television:*



. . . What we get on film is not reality exactly reproduced, but an impression of reality. Aesthetic distance. For some reason . . . this is more beautiful than the colder, more precise reproduction of reality captured by the electronic process. Simply, tape is more real, and therefore harder to manipulate or control to achieve beauty, mood, or distance . . . Another factor is color. Electronic color is more garish. Film paints more subtly . . .

Because of the qualities that Shanks describes here, film is thought to convey a sense of *past tense*. Viewers can usually sense that a filmed program has already happened, while a show on videotape – perhaps because it is more garish and less carefully edited – seems to be happening "now"; it looks like a live broadcast. Few viewers, in fact, can tell the difference between a live program and a taped one simply by looking at the images of their home sets.

Imagine, for instance, watching a nightly newscast that is on film instead of live. Though you may not immediately recognize that you are watching a filmed program, you would be able to tell that the newscast has a look to it that is clearly out of place. Now, if that same newscast were on videotape, it is quite unlikely that you would be able to tell the difference from a live broadcast.

It is largely because of our long experience with these three television formats – live, film, and videotape – that we have come to regard film as having that distinctive "past tense" quality.

It is perhaps ironic that before most filmed television programs are broadcast they are normally first transferred to videotape. Fortunately, the subtle qualities of film are not lost in this process.

Activity 6

Film or Videotape?

Choose the items from the following list that you feel would be more advantageous to produce on tape, and the ones you feel would be more advantageous to produce on film. Briefly explain your decision in each case.

1. Launching of a moon rocket
2. Feature item on season's first snowfall
3. News interview with fire chief about a case of arson
4. Coverage of inauguration of U.S. President
5. Documentary on work in West Virginia coal mines
6. Mood piece about rainstorm developing in mountains

Activity 7 Videotape or Film?

Of the following program types, decide which are produced mostly on tape, and which are produced mostly on film, and in each case explain why.

1. Situation comedies
2. Soap operas
3. Family dramas
4. Documentaries
5. Game shows
6. Late night talk shows
7. Action/adventure westerns

Television programs are expensive to make, regardless of the method used. Their costs comprise a large part of all expenses in the television industry. When a budget is drawn up for the making of a television show, a long list of details must be taken into consideration. An elaborately detailed budget may include several hundred different expense items.

The following is an excerpt from the summarized production budget for the 1966 *Star Trek* episode entitled "Where No Man Has Gone Before." Because of inflation since then, the hour-long show's cost now would be double or more the original figure.

Production/Direction Costs	
Production and direction [includes salaries to producer, associate producer, writer or writers, casting director, secretaries, and others]	$33,330
Music	3,500
Story [mostly mimeographing costs]	427
Cast [salaries for performers]	31,888
Other [includes service payment to studio]	11,185
Payroll Taxes	4,000
Total	**$84,330**

Production Costs	
Production staff [salaries to stagehands, etc.]	5,523
Camera [salaries]	5,812
Sound recording	3,152
Art department	2,809
Set construction	20,100
Greens [plants]	1,156
Grips and standby	6,899
Electrical [salaries and equipment]	11,973
Wardrobe	3,890
Set dressing	5,078
Props	3,679
Makeup	3,092
35 mm film neg. and process	9,714
Special effects	5,372
Transportation	2,494

Studio facilities [rental]	7,200
Payroll taxes	12,192
Total	**$110,135**

Post-Production Costs	
Titles, prints, dupes, etc. [copies of film]	25,466
Cutting and editing	8,905
Stock and matte shots	15,000
Scoring, recording [music dubbing]	6,554
Payroll taxes	1,529
Total	**$57,454**

Other Costs	
Insurance	745
Production overhead	1,715
Audience and publicity [press releases]	490
Indirect expenses	28,128
Total	**$31,078**
Grand Total These Items	**$282,997**

Depending on the kind of program being produced, production costs vary widely. Consider typical budgets for 1978-1979:

Dramatic show, one hour, film	410,000
Variety show, one hour, tape	340,000
Made-for-TV movie, (film), two hours	1,200,000
Situation comedy, one-half hour, tape	200,000
Game show, one-half hour, live	15,000
Network evening newscast, one-half hour, live	75,000

The Camera: What It Can Do

Video equipment in general is becoming more sophisticated and flexible every year; technical manuals are always being revised to include new equipment and techniques. Well-established guidelines and rules are often broken by people who like to experiment and make up their own new "rules."

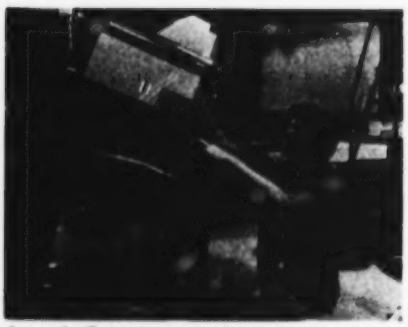
Since television is chiefly a visual medium, the camera is the medium's most important tool. It can see almost anything – the inside of a blood vessel, the dark side of the moon. A standard video camera can look closely into the pupil of an eye or, with a wide-angle lens, show us as much as one-third of the horizon at the edge of a Montana prairie. But there are two basic restrictions to what the camera sees, and neither one is likely to change for a while. First, inasmuch as a standard television screen is a rectangle in the ratio of three to four (for example, nine inches high by twelve inches wide), everything the camera shoots must be adaptable to this proportion. Second, the image on the screen must be light enough to be successfully transmitted to the viewer.

Otherwise, the television camera can do just about anything. The way it is used can create certain predictable effects on most viewers, and a good director will use camera angle, distance, and movement to generate the effect he or she wants.

For example, a camera mounted on a crane and tilting *down* at a subject gives the viewer a "superior" angle of view, making the subject appear inferior. On the other hand, a camera tilting *up* makes the subject seem large, powerful, perhaps threatening, while the viewer may feel small and inferior. Also, any sharp or violent camera movement (like a rapid motion toward an object, or a fast sweeping motion to the left or right) generates excitement or surprise.

Movement can be created by what is *seen* (actors walking around, a car in motion, etc.), by what is *seeing* (the camera), or by a combination of the two. The camera takes on the role of the viewer – what it sees is what the viewer sees; therefore, when the camera moves, the viewer's perspective moves with it, and when the camera is still, viewers feel like stationary observers.

Larry LeCain, camera operator at WGBH-TV in Boston, talks from his own experience about ways viewers can be more aware of what the camera can do:



Larry LeCain, camera operator for WGBH-TV in Boston, makes adjustments on an Ikegami television camera.

"In observing how the camera interacts with the story in purely visual terms, there are a number of things to look for: *focus* – is it steady or wavering? *composition* – is it balanced? *camera moves* – are they appropriate or unnecessary – a person walking across a room, a chase scene – used for a purpose or only to juice up the pace without advancing the story to resolution?

"Start by noting the standard shots: a *single shot*, which shows only one person; a *two shot*, which includes two people; a *wide shot*, establishing a room; a *relationship shot*, showing the interrelationship of person and object. In planning moves, a camera operator has to think about these

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A two-shot from the ABC series Soap. The camera operator helps "define relationships, to illustrate character, to demonstrate contrasts in terms of movement."

things and about the most efficient ways to communicate visually those relationships which have been established in the script or in prior discussions with the director and talent.

"Essentially, the camera operator coordinates between hand, eye, and lens to help define relationships, to illustrate character, to demonstrate contrasts in terms of movement. The operator is the director's eyes and at the visual level has a great deal to say about what eventually gets on tape or film.

"The knowledgeable camera operator always keeps in mind that when people are watching television, they are sitting in front of a small screen, probably no more than ten feet away. The relationship between the size of the screen and the distance from that screen to the viewer is an important one and by contrast, it's what makes television so different from movies: television is a close-up medium. Consequently, people and objects have to be brought in close to the viewer and made more intense, so that images are strengthened."

The following terms describe different kinds of camera movement:
Dolly in, dolly out: The camera moves on a dolly (wheeled cart) toward subject, or backs away from it.
Track left, track right: The camera moves in a straight line sideways, while the lens is pointing straight ahead.
Crane up , crane down: The camera, mounted on a large crane, moves vertically.
Pan left, pan right: The camera base stays in one place, but the camera head rotates side to side – a sweeping motion. A *swish pan* is one so rapid that the image becomes a blur.
Tilt up, tilt down: The camera head moves vertically, as if hinged.
Zoom (in or out): The camera doesn't move, but its lens does, creating an effect similar to dollying (but different enough so that directors will use dollying in for one purpose, zooming in for another).

The apparent distance of the viewer from the subject results either from physically dollying the camera in or out, or from changing the camera lenses from one focal length to another. Lenses with different focal lengths "see" differently:

Short Focal Length Lens	**Medium Focal Length Lens**	**Long Focal Length Lens**
1. Wide *angle of view:* lens sees far to the left and right	1. Normal *angle of view:* lens sees roughly what a person would see without moving	1. Narrow *angle of view:* lens sees only a small area
2. Distorts distance and size: close subjects are abnormally large; far-away subjects appear too small	2. Best imitates our own vision: size of and distance between subjects are in normal proportion	2. Subjects in field of view are disproportionately similar in size; distance is compressed
3. Great *depth of field:* close and distant subjects are all in focus	3. Normal *depth of field:* some blurring of very close and very distant subjects	3. Very short *depth of field:* five feet away, a subject's nose may be in focus, and the ears a blur
4. Requires less light	4. Requires average light	4. Requires more light

When writing a television program, a scriptwriter will present not only what the characters are doing and saying, but also suggestions as to what the camera should be doing, including the *type of shot* to be used. (A *shot* is what the camera views continuously in time and space.) Most shows are shot by several cameras at the same time, each one shooting from a different position and/or using a different kind of shot. When a director switches from one camera to another, or stops a camera from recording, the shot ends.

There are several ways that separate shots can be connected to one another. The producer or director has the right to make changes, but in script form these instructions help people visualize how each shot might appear:

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Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

A close-up: Richard Thomas and Sian Barbara Allen in a scene from The Waltons *special entitled "The Thanksgiving Story," which aired in the fall of 1976.*

CU (Close-up): Shows only head and shoulders of subject, or even less, as if viewers were very close to subject. "CU of Hilary through car window as she starts to open the door."

MS (Mid-shot): Will show a person from the waist up, as if viewer had moved back a little. "MS of Hilary standing by car shaking her head."

LS (Long shot): Area in sight may be ten to thirty feet wide, as if viewers were far away. "LS of Hilary going up to meet husband on front lawn."

A *cut*, the most common method of connecting one shot to another, is simply the abrupt end of one shot and the beginning of another. Or, a shot can *fade out*, gradually darkening to a black screen, and a new shot can *fade in*. Fades are generally used to indicate a change of scene or the passage of time.

When a fade-out coincides with a fade-in, the technique is called a *dissolve*. In the middle of the dissolve we see both shots overlaying each other. Dissolves can be so subtle that we're hardly aware of one shot changing to another.

Other Production Elements

Television production, whether film or videotape equipment, requires complicated combinations of various elements – lights and sound equipment as well as cameras, performers, and scenery – arranged in the best possible pattern. Creating the right arrangement is no easy task: each element affects the others.

Lighting

Lighting is as intricate a part of the making of a TV show as the cameras and what they shoot. There are two basic kinds: *overall* lighting or "general illumination" – the even, all-over light that makes it possible for you to see what is going on; and *special purpose* lighting, used to create effects like moonlight or to throw dramatic shadows on a performer's face. The trend today, because of the high cost of equipment and the shortage of time in most production schedules, is increasingly away from special purpose lighting. (Try comparing movies of the 1930s and 40s with current TV shows; you will probably notice more dramatic use of lighting in the older movies.) Even if a show is lit only for general illumination, the multiple-camera approach can cause problems. Imagine a stationary object – an actor or a piece of furniture – on a TV set, and then imagine three cameras focused on that object, each from a different angle. The result of this from the viewer's point of view may be shadows pointing in three different directions – something that looks distractingly unnatural because it does not normally occur in the real world. The extra equipment required to bleach those shadows out, however, is often so costly that reality has to be sacrificed to financial pressures – and, again, to time pressures as well, for every piece of lighting equipment used in a show must be carefully set up and accurately aimed to light what it is supposed to light at exactly the right angle.

Still, TV lighting designers do try as much as possible within the limitations of the medium to use lights in order to enhance mood, as well as just to provide visibility.

MacDonald Carey of the popular soap opera Days of Our Lives *casts several shadows. Videotape production requires multiple lights because cameras tape simultaneously from different angles.*

Activity 8

Lighting and Mood

In the two photographs below (taken with an ordinary 35 mm camera during actual production), notice how light works to focus our attention and create mood. Write a brief statement of what effect the lighting has on the image in each photograph.

Robert Culp in an I Spy episode entitled "The Warlord." Broadcast from 1965 to 1968, this popular espionage series co-starred Bill Cosby.

Family at Christmas: from left, Gary Frank, Kristy McNichol, Quinn Cummings, Soda Thompson, James Broderick.

Audio

Audio, the sound that accompanies the picture, plays an integral role in television production. You might think of the audio as layers of sound that provide information through words, plus further layers that communicate time and place (sound effects), and mood and feeling (usually music). Distances between the constantly shifting performers and their microphones, unavoidable noises in the studio during production, and extraneous sounds picked up by microphones in outdoor locations make good television sound often difficult to achieve. Without a proper mix of sounds – voice, sound effects, music – a scene or a show may have a certain hollowness.

Editing

See Reading 3.4, "Editing for Rhythm"

See Reading 3.5, "In Conversation with Barbara Searles"

The making of an hour-long filmed program for television may require anywhere from ten to more than one hundred hours of filming. The final product includes only the best pieces of film; all the rest ends up "on the cutting room floor."

Editing is the process of selecting, arranging, and joining all the shots together for the "master print" – the program we finally see on television. The film editor often works closely with the director and the producer in

Film editing on a Steenbeck editing machine: the film (visual only) portion feeds from spool to spool, farthest from the editor. The other spools, or plates, handle two separate magnetic sound tracks. When the editor has chosen what is to be saved, the two sound tracks will be "mixed" and added to the film portion.

deciding what stays in and what doesn't. The editor's first job is to eliminate shots of obvious poor quality. Next he or she must choose good shots and arrange them in their proper order. Most filmed and some videotaped programs are not shot in the order in which they come in the script, and so must be pieced together properly in the editing room.

Filmed television programs, like movies, can derive much of their impact from good editing. Quick shots joined together in rapid succession give us excitement, speed, even chaos. More sustained shots which slowly dissolve into one another give us quite the opposite feeling. Skillful editing can deliberately confuse, bewilder, or alarm us. It can transport us over distances and through time. It can show us what main characters are thinking, or it can prevent us from seeing something that only the main character should see.

Editing on *videotape* can arrive at the same results as can film editing, although through a very different process. In film, editing is done after the show has been shot and the film processed, but when a show is taped it is usually edited by the careful selection of shots in the control room while the actors are actually performing. This is sometimes called "instantaneous editing." The director sees on the monitors what each camera sees, and edits the program by choosing among the two, three, or more cameras that are being used.

Activity 9

Evaluating a Television Production

From your regular television viewing, select a program to evaluate for its production technique. As you watch the show, make notes about camera work (movement, length of shots, types of lenses you think were probably used), lighting, sound and music, sets, and any other production elements – costumes, makeup – that may have contributed to the total effect of the show. Evaluate these elements from the point of view of a thoughtful television critic. Remember that fair evaluation requires both positive and negative comments.

See Reading 3.3, "A Day in the Life of a Producer"

◆ Producers and directors of taped and filmed television programs gradually develop their production skills over years of experience and experimentation. Cameras, lights, sets, and sound can work together in many different combinations, producing so many different effects that the possibilities for manipulating the viewer are almost limitless. And yet, money and time can be obstacles to a producer's using all the effects that he or she might wish to. A producer who habitually "comes in over budget" – who spends more on a production than was planned – will have a brief career in television. We often hear of movies costing much more to make than was originally estimated, but rarely do we hear this of television shows, whose budgets are largely determined by how many advertising dollars can be anticipated in support of the programs. Generally speaking, commercial television production relies on tried and true formulas; experimentation is more for noncommercial television and television students.

Reading

3.1 In Conversation with Ed Zwick

Ed Zwick, story editor for ABC-TV's popular drama Family, describes how a typical episode is structured, and how freely characters may move within that structure. What does a story editor need to know in order to do his or her job?

"Technique, Craft, and Finesse"

What exactly does a story editor for a television program like Family *do?*

He is responsible for working with writers on the ideas that either they bring in, or that we of the show give them – developing these ideas into a treatment (a ten-page prose story), and then into the first draft of a script. He is then responsible for rewriting scripts that are unsatisfactory – that is to say, not up to our standards or expectations. For example, if the writer has not done a good job at the point of treatment, we call it a "cut-off" and either write the script ourselves or assign it to another writer. If the same thing is true after the first draft, we rework it ourselves. A third function is to work with the production company (solving problems peculiar to TV production), the director (according to his unique vision of the script), and the actors (to include their contributions of changes in dialogue and consistency of character).

Who comes up with the original plot idea?

We do. The producers and the network to a lesser degree.

So we're talking about a team approach.

Right. Unless a writer brings in something we've not thought of, in which case we would then hire that writer to develop the idea with us.

You mean somebody who watched the show could say, "I see a way that these characters might –?"

Absolutely.

When a series like Family *is in its beginning stages, how do you work out your characters, how do you flesh them out?*

This show was conceived by a woman named Jay Presson Allen, a screenwriter of enormous talent and reputation. In the pilot that she wrote and in a thoughtful set of bylaws, she offered a description of who these characters are, what their lives are like, and how they might be expected to grow – all hypothetical, of course, but a great deal of forethought is given to such matters before a series begins. At the beginning of each new series everyone sits down and tries to chart the course of each character's growth over that year.

Are the characters sometimes changed by the actors that are chosen to play them?

We happen to work with a group of actors who bring to the show a great deal of sophistication and experience, not only by virtue of their abilities as actors but also as creative human beings. It's natural that they will influence the development and the direction of the characters.

So which becomes stronger as a successful series goes along – the writing and what the behind-the-scenes people do, or the actors?

Inevitably it is the obligation of the writer and the writing staff to sustain the show. The piano did not invent the concerto, you know.

Some Family *shows are really compelling. How do you go about creating characters that come across on the screen, come into your home, and win you over with situations that may represent your life but sometimes seem awfully simplified?*

Well, you have to realize that the issues dealt with on *Family* are quite the same as you've seen in soap operas and any number of other shows, but I think the difference lies in the texture with which we try to dramatize the idea. The *Family* show about divorce, for example, concerns itself with the divorce of the characters involved, but that is not ultimately what the show's about. The show is about the relationship between a mother and her daughter who have never learned to resolve certain differences, and about a past relationship that has always been one way until it is reconciled through the catalyst of a crumbling marriage. If this series is the story of a family in the 1970s coping with day-to-day problems, the problems themselves are going to be ordinary, but still richly textured.

Yet we must work within severe limitations no matter what the problem we present: it has to be reconciled and resolved within an hour, and that is necessarily unrealistic. Such problems in life are not always resolved – such conflicts are not reconciled – within an hour! That is the single most unrealistic part of any episode. Therefore, what we try to do is give the characters room for growth – not necessarily from A to Z, but rather from A to B. They take small steps as opposed to giant steps. You can't have a character in a series go through quantum leaps of maturity every single week. Otherwise at the end of a twenty-six-week season, he would have evolved to the awareness of a Buddhist master.

But can you have a character continually developing through a series, rather than remaining static?

Yes. I think a case in point is the character of Nancy on our show. She began as a rather selfish, somewhat spoiled girl who couldn't deal with her marriage, came running home, and then went through an odyssey that's led her back out into an apartment of her own and a job as a single, working mother with all the responsibilities that entails.

Buddy is another example. Kristy McNichol, who plays the character of Buddy, has actually grown up on the show. When the show began, she was twelve; now she's sixteen, and all the problems that are involved in growing up have been in the stories told every year on the show.

What do you think are the components that make Family *as successful as it is, and as long-running by current television standards?*

I don't really know, but I think it has to do with our vigilance with the material – with the quality of the material – and with the quality of the actors, those chosen for the other parts in the show and the actors who are the recurring characters. A lot of it has to do with the initial conception of characters who

are willing to take risks with one another, yell at one another, have flaws and reveal weaknesses, yet share an abiding love . . . how's that?

It seems almost magical!

Sure! But there is a great deal of technique, craft, and finesse in making the show what it is. I think we have one of the best structures of such shows.

That's a good point. Let's talk about structuring a dramatic show over the course of an hour. How is that done?

Well, most shows have different formats. Ours is a four-act formula with a subplot. I'd say the weight of the main plot is about sixty-five percent, and the subplot is about thirty-five percent or less. It's essentially a classical three-act structure, with the second and third act really filling the role of the longer second act in classical drama. By the end of the first act, the problem has been crystalized; you know exactly what the issues are at hand. In the second act the conflict escalates; by the third act it reaches its crisis; and in the fourth act it is resolved with the denouement.

Does the first act end at the first commercial break?

Precisely.

So commercials are really determining factors in how you go about doing things.

Well, that structure is built in. That is to say, we know that at the end of the first act there will be a commercial break. There's one every fifteen minutes or so, though it's changeable according to the length of the individual acts.

You call your structure "essentially classical . . ."

Yes. The Platonic formula of rising action, crisis, and denouement: the subplot serves as a leavening factor, a humorous digression to an otherwise serious story, or else it might in some way resonate from the main plot, or echo it in reverse.

What are some other conventional forms from drama that you keep in mind when you're doing the show?

I often think of 1950s drama, the kind of problem plays, the plays of William Inge, Tennessee Williams. I also think of well-turned short stories of Somerset Maugham, O. Henry, or Graham Greene.

That's pretty high company.

Well, why not set one's sights on the highest? I'd rather choose them as my muse than lesser inspiration.

Do you think kids could look at a Maugham short story, or an Inge play, and then go back and look at Family *and see resemblances or parallel directions?*

I don't know. You're not going to find a specific idea suggested by one and then performed in the other, but you might see how an idea is developed dramatically, purely in terms of the structure – or discover that things are not necessarily about what they seem to be on the surface.

Meredith Baxter Birney (right) as Family's *Nancy: She began as a rather selfish, somewhat spoiled girl who couldn't deal with her marriage . . ."*

3.2 *Star Trek needs no introduction to most people. A "sleeper" during the 1960s when it was a prime time program, it has become more popular in syndication than when it was first shown.*

In the book The Making of Star Trek, *Stephen E. Whitfield, with Gene Roddenberry, the program's creator, offers us an inside look at the development of the series. Here, Whitfield presents some of Roddenberry's thoughts on techniques for writing scripts for the show, and summaries of three minor characters (Chekov, Sulu, and Lieutenant Uhura) as they were conceived.*

Characterization in Star Trek

by Stephen E. Whitfield
from *The Making of Star Trek*
by Stephen E. Whitfield and
Gene Roddenberry
Ballantine Books, 1968

Seven Rules

Although there does not seem to be any way to second-guess what the networks will object to in the way of dialogue or other aspects of a show, there *is* a way to orient writers as to how they should approach their scripts for the *Star Trek* series. Every potential scriptwriter for a *Star Trek* episode is issued a copy of the *Star Trek* Guide. This is a document outlining the character traits, script requirements, standing sets available to use in various scenes, and a whole host of background information related to the *Star Trek* series.

The following is an example of the type of guidance offered to aspiring *Star Trek* scriptwriters:

If you're a TV professional, you already know the following seven rules:

1. Build your episode on an action-adventure framework. We must reach out, hold and *entertain* a mass audience of some 20,000,000 people or we simply don't stay on the air.
2. Tell your story about *people*, not about science and gadgetry. Joe Friday [a policeman] doesn't stop to explain the mechanics of his .38 before he uses it; Kildare [a doctor] never did a monologue about the theory of anesthetics; Matt Dillon [a western marshal] never identifies and discusses the breed of his horse before he rides off on it.
3. Keep in mind that science fiction is not a separate field of literature with rules of its own, but, indeed, needs the same ingredients as any story – including a jeopardy of some type to someone we learn to care about, climactic build, sound motivation, you know the list.
4. Then, with that firm foundation established, interweave in it any statement to be made about man, society, and so on. Yes, we do want you to have something to say, but say it entertainingly as you do on any other show. We don't need essays, however brilliant.
5. Remember always that *Star Trek* is never fantasy; whatever happens, no matter how unusual or bizarre, must have some basis in either fact or theory *and stay true to that premise* (don't give the enemy Starflight capability and then have them engage our vessel with grappling hooks and drawn swords).
6. Don't try to tell a story about whole civilizations. We've never yet been able to get a usable story from a writer who began . . . "I see the strange civilization which . . ."
7. Stop worrying about not being a scientist. How many cowboys, police officers, and doctors wrote Westerns, detective and hospital shows?

The Star Trek Script Format

The Teaser. We open with action, always establishing a strong jeopardy, need, or other "hook." It is not necessary to establish all the back story in the teaser. Instead, we tantalize the audience with a promise of excitement to come. For example, it can be as simple as everyone tense on the bridge, hunting down a marauding enemy ship . . . then a tale-telling blip is sighted on the screen, and the Captain orders, "All hands to battle stations." Fade out, that's enough.

The Acts. Four acts in length. Act One usually begins with Captain's VOICE OVER, Captain Kirk dictating his log. Necessary back story should be laid in here, not in the teaser. The Captain's log should be succinct and crisp . . . in ship commander "log" language.

Opening Act One, we need some form of orbit, establishing, or other silent shot to give us time for both Captain's log and opening credits.

We must have a strong ending to Act Two, something that will keep the audience tuned to our channel.

Style. We maintain a fast pace . . . avoid long, philosophical exchanges or tedious explanations of equipment. And note that our cutting technique is to use the shortest possible time between idea and execution of it . . . like, for instance, Kirk decides that a landing party will transport down to a planet . . . *Hard cut* to lights blinking on the Transporter console, *Pull back* to *Reveal* the landing party stepping into the Transporter.

Page Count. First drafts can run up to 70 pages, if you intend to trim and tighten later. But for final polished draft absolutely no more than 65 pages, please.

Another Please. Cast and set lists with your draft. Thank you.

Excerpt from *Star Trek Guide*

Characters
Ensign Chekov

The part of Chekov was the result of two things. First, a desire on Roddenberry's part to strengthen the show's appeal to the teen-age audience:

TO: Joe D'Agosta
FROM: Gene Roddenberry
DATE: September 22, 1966
SUBJECT: Needed Crew Type

Keeping our teen-age audience in mind, also keeping aware of current trends, let's watch for a young irreverent, English-accent Beatle type to try on the show, possibly with an eye to him reoccurring. Like the smallish fellow who looks to be a hit on "The Monkees." Personally I find this type spirited and refreshing, and I think our episodes could use that kind of lift. Let's discuss.

Gene Roddenberry

Second, a criticism by the youth edition of the Russian newspaper *Pravda*. In an official article the newspaper mentioned *Star Trek* favorably, but complained about the lack of a Russian crew member aboard the *Enterprise*. They felt Russians had been more than a little important in space exploration and should be so recognized.

The Chekov thing was a major error on our part, and I'm still embarrassed by the fact we didn't include a Russian right from the beginning. However, now it's Russia's turn to be embarrassed. After we wrote Chekov into the show, we sent a long, polite letter to the Minister of Cultural Affairs in Moscow, apologizing for the error and telling him about Chekov. That was over a year ago, and they still haven't answered us. So we're square.

The character of Chekov is played with all the impetuousness of youth. All Ensigns seem universally twenty-two years old, but he is portrayed as being reliable and dependable, with a good head on his shoulders in spite of his youth.

This is his first space assignment. Officially, he's a Navigator, but he's also able to be assigned to various points around the ship. If he is ultimately going to be a Command Officer, he has to have a working knowledge of the ship. He may be transferred down into Engineering at some point, or take over the helm, and frequently takes over Spock's Library-computer if Spock is not there. He may prove to have a logical, analytical enough mind to qualify in that area. Possibly he would move up to Science Officer someday. Spock feels that Chekov is good material to work with and has potential, but they are not pals or buddies.

He was born in Russia, near Moscow. Chekov comes from a middle-class family. Pavel is his first name, which means Paul in Russian.

He is a nice, normal young man, with the normal strong twenty-two-year-old urge for young ladies. Still, he is nowhere near ready to settle down yet. He probably will make a career of the Space Service, is a dedicated young officer who is believed by Captain Kirk to have the potential of being a future starship commander.

Ensign Chekov is portrayed by Walter Koenig, an unusually likeable young man and a highly talented actor. Interestingly enough, both his parents were born in Russia . . .

Sulu

Sulu . . . is of mixed Asian ancestry . . . . He changes hobbies about once a week, and whatever he is currently involved in, he lets you know all about it. Biology, fencing, and physical exercise have all been kicks of his at one time or another. Although he goes from one new hobby to another, an interest in space biology has been somewhat consistent.

Although of mixed Oriental and Filipino background, Sulu's cultural heritage is mainly Japanese, and he finds himself drawn to the samurai concept as a philosophy. Despite this, he is a rather "hip" character and has an excellent sense of humor.

Sulu [played by George Takei] is a career officer, a most efficient Helmsman, and is also considered highly proficient in his secondary duty of *Enterprise* Weapons Officer. He usually is the one who handles the firing of phasers of torpedoes as needed . . .

. . . On the subject of Sulu, Gene Roddenberry recalls a letter he received about halfway through the first season:

It was from the Oriental Protective Association, which is like the NAACP. The letter firmly chastised us because these people had watched a number of the shows and had noticed it was the Occidentals who always ended up with the girls. They threatened to boycott the show if we didn't give them a satisfactory answer.

So, with George's permission, I wrote them back saying that our contract with Mr. Takei was based on the Kellogg-Briand Treaty of 1925 in which Japan got three battleships for every five that Great Britain and the United States got. I promised them that on that basis Mr. Takei would receive three girls for every five that Kirk and McCoy got. It must have seemed like a reasonable answer because we never heard from them again!

One incident occurred with George that points out the unexpected problems that can arise, simply in writing ideas into a script. During the rewrite session on "The Naked Time" by John D. F. Black (a story in which a disease is brought aboard the ship – a disease that strips away inhibitions and reveals the "core" of each person), someone suggested it would be funny if Sulu, as an Oriental, secretly wanted to be the French swordsman, D'Artagnan. Gene thought it was a wild idea, so it was written into the script.

Little did anyone suspect that Oriental George Takei really did want to be a French swordsman! During the six days of filming, George continually wandered around the sets, lunging and parrying with his sword. The crew ultimately threatened to quit, en masse, if anyone ever gave Takei a sword again!

Uhura

Communications Officer Uhura is an African, a citizen of the Bantu Nation of United Africa of the 23rd century. Since childhood she had been interested in communications and was already a highly proficient communications professional at eighteen years of age when her sense of adventure led her into the Space Service. She is a desirable and attractive young lady, and a highly able starship officer, considered by Captain Kirk to be as fully capable and reliable as any lieutenant aboard.

Uhura is torn between the idea of someday becoming a wife and mother, and a desire to remain in the service as a career officer. Her life at present is a battle between her female need for the pleasant routine of Earthbound home and family versus the personal challenge of starship life and continued new worlds to conquer.

Proud of her heritage, she wears African dress off duty and when relaxing. Her life philosophy, nowhere near as Westernized as Sulu's, reflects the warm, non-agressive "man-nature-oneness" culture of the 23rd century Bantu nation which became Earth's best example of blending advanced technology with a naturalistic agrarian philosophy.

Uhura (feminine for the Swahili word for "freedom") frequently figures prominently in *Star Trek* adventures. She is well-liked by the entire crew, and during off-duty hours in the ship's recreation areas is in demand for her song ballads, ranging from traditional Earth tunes to favorites from a dozen other planets (making use of the actress's background as a professional songstress).

Nichelle Nichols is featured as Communications Officer Uhura . . . .

3.3 *Formerly the producer of* The Merv Griffin Show, *Bob Shanks has been an ABC-TV programming vice-president since 1972. His popular book* The Cool Fire: How to Make It in Television *is a personal account of what it takes to make a career in television, based on his diverse experiences in the business. Below, excerpted from that book, is Shanks's portrait of . . .*

A Day in the Life of a Producer

by Bob Shanks
from *The Cool Fire: How to Make It in Television*
W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976

. . . I was producing a variety color special on location around New York City, and through six days of production, it had rained every day. This particular day, I had Dionne Warwick in front of the Pulitzer Fountain by the Plaza Hotel. It was raining Biblically. Dionne was wonderfully patient and good-natured about working at all in such brutal weather, and we had to finish. The show had an air date in two weeks; Dionne had only this one day to give me. She was due to fly out the following morning to open in Las Vegas for three weeks.

Struggling, we had been able to get our "master" shot . . . in at least one acceptable "take." In fact, the shot was lovely. The song was "Alfie" and the effect of the rain and Dionne in yellow rain gear, walking along at night holding an umbrella, was beautifully heightened by the poignancy of the song and her performance.

For two hours we had been trying to get just one take of the same song in "medium close" and "close-up." Without these shots, the master shot was meaningless. Dionne Warwick could have been Deanna Durbin, we were so far away.

There was a staff and crew of forty. There were half a dozen cops, blocking off two streets of traffic. There was the remote truck and the generator truck and tons of lighting equipment. The setup, if I recall correctly, was costing $15,000. Everyone wanted to give up, "strike"* the location, abandon the song, since we were already well into overtime and there appeared to be no letup in the rain or wind. I kept stalling or disappearing from one spot on the location to another, trying to avoid the pressure to quit and scanning the sky, hoping for a break. I could not accept losing the song. The bloody thing only ran three minutes. Three minutes – that's all I needed! We were in overtime anyway, I thought; the money was already spent and to spend it all and have nothing to show for it was killing me. Even worse, I could see from the master how beautiful the number would be if we could only get it. The pressures to give up became enormous, from my own people and from Dionne's manager, whom I did not blame. He had Las Vegas to think about and the prospect of a wet and weary star getting ill.

Dionne, bless her, never wavered. "I don't mind. I'd like to get it." Finally, around 3:00 in the morning, the rain let up. It did not stop, but it did diminish and so did the wind. We went for a take.

Dionne went to her mark, the lights sizzled on, and I ran into the control truck to watch. She got her cue and began her walk. Eight bars, beautiful. Sixteen bars, still beautiful. Then – I was standing right over the director's shoulder – I could see the umbrella beginning to turn inside-out. "That's that," the director moaned. Nobody moved. "Oh, God, no," I thought, "this is our only chance!" Now what? Suddenly, I had an idea. Risky, stupid, and odds against it, but I went with it.

"Zoom it up to her nostrils," I barked at the director, who was wanting to cut. "Don't you dare cut. Tight, go in tight on her – tight as you can. I'm going out there. Hold a wide shot on number 2. You'll be able to see if I can save the damn umbrella."

We had to have the umbrella in the medium and close shots or they would not "cut" with the master shot. In one she would have the umbrella, in the others she wouldn't. That would be ridiculous, unless we called it "The Disappearing Umbrella Act" or something.

I banged out of the control truck and raced to Dionne. When I thought I was in picture range, I dropped to my hands and knees. Dionne must have thought I had gone crazy, but some professional instinct in her told her not to stop singing or take notice of me. When I got to her, I reached up for the umbrella and straightened its bent ribs. Slowly, I handed it back up to her. Now she could manage it. Even the wind helped by subsiding a bit. She kept walking and the umbrella seemed to be holding. I sneaked back out, still on my hands and knees, and Dionne went on to the end of the song. We had gotten the medium and close-up shots and they were gorgeous.

In the cutting room, we covered the few seconds in which the umbrella was missing with the extreme close-up the director had gone in for, "supered"* over the wide, or master, shot. For the rest of the song, we were able to use the marvelous medium close-ups in which that blasted umbrella was framing Dionne's beautiful face.

Small things, and audiences never see them. Instead of this solution, I am sure we could have found others, but I am proud of this.

* *strike: to "strike" a set is to disassemble it.*

* *super (superimposition): the laying over of one image on top of another, especially graphics or words over a television picture.*

3.4 *Filmed television programs, some say, make or break it in the editing room, where all the takes of all the different scenes are cut to bits and pieced back together again to create the show we finally see. A good film editor is as creative as a good film director or television producer. What effect does the film editor's work have on the television program you see on your set?*

Editing for Rhythm

by David Coynik
from *Film: Real to Reel*
McDougal, Littell, 1976

Even when a naturally cinematic or rhythmic subject is filmed, most of the rhythm of a film is determined by the manner in which the director edits the shots of the subject. If he edits the shots so that each has a slow, equal length, the audience will experience the relaxing, rhythmic feeling one might feel by rocking in a rocking chair. Such a regular rhythm would make the viewer experience a feeling of relaxation, order, calmness.

If the director edits his shots, however, so that each shot lasts a short time on the screen, his viewers will probably

feel excited. They will know that the tempo of the action has picked up and will expect an important, dangerous, or fast-moving event.

For example, if in a Western four men are sitting around in a saloon sequence, the director may decide to make every shot last a long time on the screen to reflect the feeling that a card game is an activity with a very slow rhythm. If one of the players accuses another of dealing from the bottom of the deck, however, the tempo of the events around the table will speed up. Matching this speed-up of the rhythm of events, the filmmaker will most probably increase the tempo of the editing. From the long slow shots he has been using, he will switch to short-lasting shots, and the rhythm of the sequence will accelerate. Maybe one of the antagonists will go for his gun, and a fight may start. The editing will reflect this by very quick shots. When the fighting is over, the director will again let each shot last longer on the screen, creating a slower rhythm.

Whenever a director speeds up the rhythm of his editing, he is not utilizing some unnatural device to make his audience experience the excitement of the event on the screen, but rather he is reflecting the normal human reaction to excitement. If something dangerous or exciting happens to us, our bodies naturally react to it by speeding up their rhythms. When we are in danger, our pulses speed up, our heart rhythms become quicker. When a filmmaker speeds up the rhythm of the sequence by cutting down the length of each shot, he is signaling to our minds these same quickenings and excitement . . .

. . . To create a feeling of developing excitement, a filmmaker may start a sequence with long shots and progressively shorten each shot so that the rhythm of the sequence increases. And perhaps one shot in this group is held longer than the others to create suspense. In one scene from Lelouch's *A Man and a Woman*, drivers wait to run to their cars at the beginning of the twenty-four-hour Le Mans race. The shot of the drivers waiting for the clock to strike the hour is held on the screen longer than the other shots to create a feeling of suspense, of waiting, on the part of the audience. Everything else is happening quickly, but there is that agonizing wait for the clock to signal the beginning of the race.

3.5 In Conversation with Barbara Searles

Barbara Searles is associate director of Days of Our Lives, *one of the highly regarded daytime serials, or "soaps." Here she describes why a taped program has a look to it that is different from a filmed program, and explains a typical daily production schedule. What are the production elements that present the special soap opera "look"?*

Production of a Daytime Serial

Daytime dramas are taped on stage in a television studio. Everything is done within sets (as opposed to on location, or on a backlot*). The action is like theater. Films may seem more real because you are actually in cars, you are on boats, you are on the ocean. You are on location – the desert, the city streets. When you watch something that's done on a set or a

* *backlot: a term designating an outdoor film studio area, usually with preconstructed sets.*

Maggie's bedroom, one of the studio sets for Days of Our Lives. *Notice again the multiple shadows.*

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stage, you go with it in your imagination – you accept it as a different kind of reality.

Tape and film are different mediums. Take lighting as an example. In film you normally use one camera and you can light every shot perfectly. You light for the master, for each close-up. You stop. You move the camera in and you re-light for every shot, which means everybody is lit perfectly. With tape, on the other hand, you're running through a whole scene or act with no stops, using three cameras simultaneously. So you try to achieve basic lighting that will cover all angles. If the actors often appear soft or shadowy, the lighting is at fault. With three cameras you cannot light perfectly for close-up and then not see that piece of lighting equipment when your camera moves back for a wide shot.

A taped show must be pre-lit. This is one of the basic differences in technique between tape and film. The director has laid out what he's going to do, where the people will be, where the furniture will be. On *Days of Our Lives*, for example, the lighting crew comes in early, at around three in the morning, and they do a basic lighting for that whole day's work. Actors, director, associate director, and stage manager come in at six a.m., camera crew at seven a.m. We do a complete show every day. On a filmed show you probably have five shooting days for a ninety-minute show, and six weeks for a feature. So what we have to do is flat lighting, which gives that softer effect. Film looks sharp and clear because production takes a week to do what we do in one day. In film there may be a little bit of lighting done before the cast rehearses a scene, but it's basically lit shot by shot, close-up by close-up, which is what makes the day long and costs so much. Tape is less expensive because it's done faster. And perhaps it is not done as well technically. Now when you project it on "the little box at home," as we refer to it, you will accept a less perfect product because faults are not as glaring on the small screen. You could not take the same tape show and project it on a big motion picture screen – it would be unacceptable. It would be grainy and fuzzy and unclear. Because films are projected on huge screens, they must be much more meticulously lit, color-corrected, and so forth.

Film people marvel that an hour taped show can be done in one day. I think there's much more tolerance developing between these two media – tape and film – even though the people within each discipline are unfamiliar with each other's techniques. I do both film and tape. There are getting to be more people like me – assistants who "cross over" from tape to film. Directors have been doing it for years. It is the engineers and technicians who are suspicious and distrustful of each other. Anyway, film people marvel at the fact that we can come in at six in the morning and finish the show by five p.m. the next day. The first cast calls are at six in the morning, and by eight o'clock, the director has blocked – planned all of the moves of – the cast. A eight-thirty we go on camera, and we must re-block the action for the camera operators. The actors now have to stop asking questions about their motivations. They must be robots, moving around for the cameramen to learn their moves. Then after each scene is camera-blocked, we do a run-through without stops to see if what we've planned really works and to get back into the flow of the drama, instead of just mechanically moving people around by the numbers. That takes us from about eight-thirty till eleven-thirty. We block set by set: everything that happens in the hospital, everything that happens in Mickey and Maggie's kitchen. In other words, we may do a scene from the prologue, a scene from Act I, and a scene from Act VI together, not in the same order as they will be seen in the "air" show. So the actors must jump around in their own minds and remember what

Editing videotape: the numbers you see are the hour, minute, second, and frame number (30 per second) of the image on the tape, making editing as flexible as with film.

level of intensity they should have in each scene and be able to bring this effectively to the viewer. When you see it all put together in editing, it flows dramatically from beginning to end, prologue through epilogue. Afterwards, we break for an hour lunch, and then come back for a dress rehearsal from twelve-thirty to one-thirty. The dress rehearsal is supposed to run without any stops, just as the scenes will appear on the air with music and sound effects included. The women are sometimes still in curlers, but we try to get everybody as ready as we can. Then the director gives the actors notes while the technicians make sure the equipment is okay. From one-thirty to two p.m. or so the actors are given their notes to help polish their performances. And if things haven't happened right technically or if there needs to be a prop added or a picture moved or any of those things, we get all those things done. And then around two o'clock we start taping the show. We usually finish between four and four-thirty. If something goes wrong, we will stop and retape a scene or a line, but we try to do as little as possible because, again, time is money. Every edit we make means more time in post-production. At this point the show is all on a ninety-minute reel of tape, and the next day it gets assembled in editing. Out of the 58:24* we end up with, 43:47 is program. The rest is commercials, billboards, and credits.

If all goes well, editing the show should take about two and a half hours. We edit one show on Monday, two shows on each Wednesday and Friday. On days when we do two shows we may be in the editing room from six in the morning until about eleven-thirty. After we've put a show together, we make copies, or "dubs," for distribution. I watch the dub and re-time the whole show to make sure that everything I've set up in editing really does work. Since all the commercials are put on a computer to be rolled in when the program is aired, it's critically important that these times be correct to the second. When you're editing, you can be distracted and can make a mistake. Hopefully you don't, but sometimes you've written something down, indicating where a commercial goes, and maybe you've copied it wrong or you've made a little mistake. This is your chance to correct yourself. You make out a Telecast Report for the network, showing where all the breaks come. The people who work in Master Control and Switching Central set up their computers to roll the commercials in exactly where you say they should be. So you'd better be right!

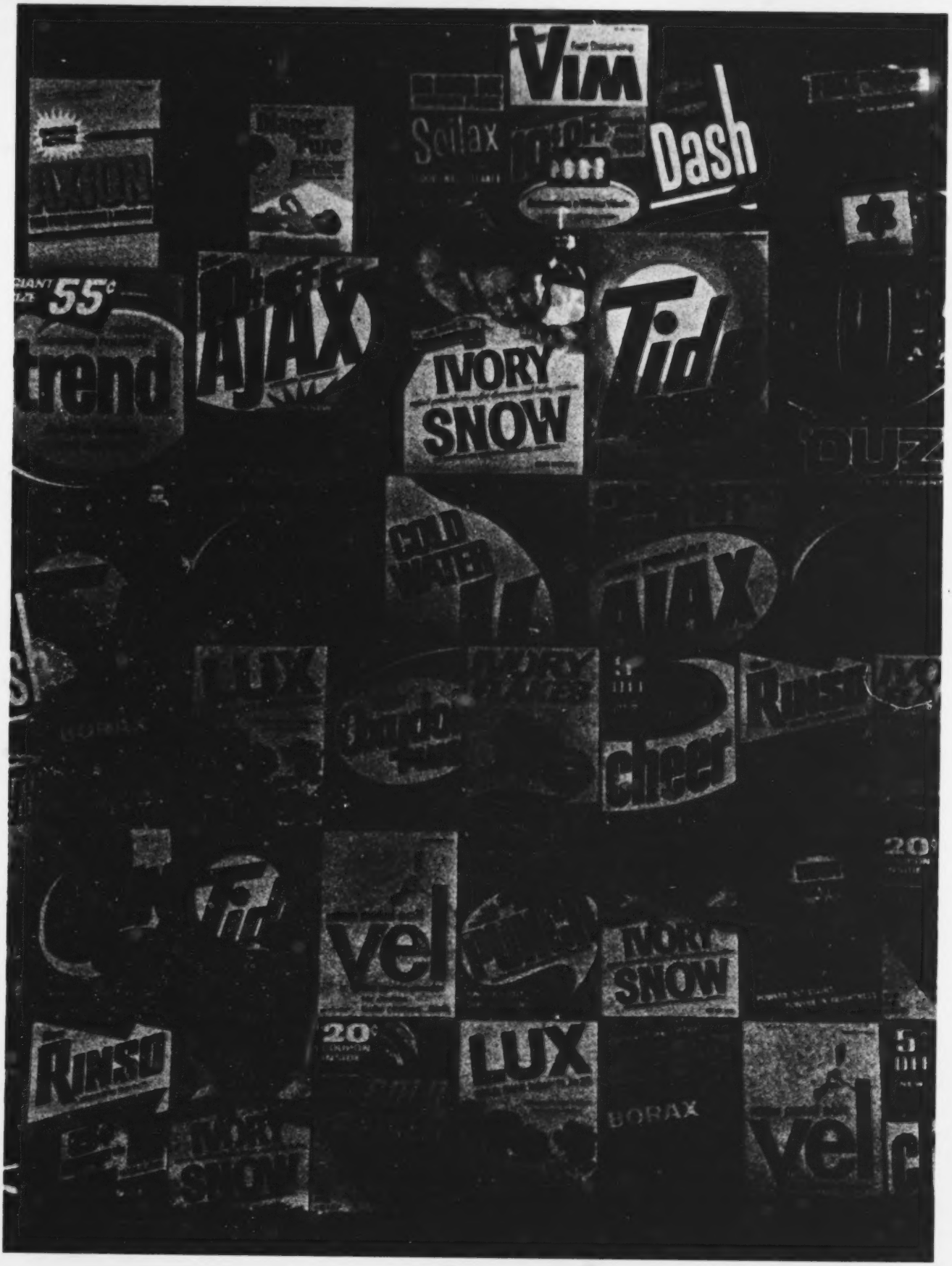
Electronic coding makes tape editing as flexible as film editing. It's technical but very important. There's a computerized digital readout (called a "character generator") in the studio where you're making the show, and the same kind of readout information – character generated numbers – appears on your tape. These are "time of day" numbers and are used like "edge-numbering" in film. In film, editors can look at the edge of the film and say that that's J168, and it's supposed to be editing next to J542, or whatever. Well, we couldn't do that with videotape, since it is electronic, until they figured out how to put similar information on the edge of videotape. So if I press a button and stop my digital clock and write down that number, then when I go into editing I feed that number into the playback machinery, and it calls up that same scene to the exact second and frame. (On tape there are thirty frames per second.) It saves us hours and hours and hours. It means that we can very efficiently get through the day and go directly to the scene we want without having to look at a whole lot of garbage. We used to do the show as if it were live. That is, we used to roll commercials, or sit through the precise two minutes and two seconds of "black"* where two commercials would be inserted, and we would run the whole show from beginning to end like a play. But that would take from six in the morning until perhaps six or seven at night. By not sitting through the blacks and by shooting out of sequence, we don't have to sit through two minutes and two seconds six times. And, by organizing the show the ways they shoot film, we also have saved ourselves all the time of moving from the Horton living room up to Mickey and Maggie's kitchen and over to the hospital and back to the Horton's living room, and back to the hospital, and back to the Horton's – wasting all that time schlepping equipment back and forth from one end of the stage to the other.

The show has been on about thirteen years. When it was first done, it was live on the air as it happened, with no doing it over or fixing things in editing. When it was live, it had to be done exactly the way you see it at home. In those days they started the rehearsal the day before, and then came in and did the show. It was a half-hour show and a lot of things were different. Originally, when I first started doing soaps in New York in the mid-50s, we actually rolled in commercials and did some live commercials, too. It was quite an exercise. When tape came along, it made it possible for us to correct errors, do things over, and simplify our technique. We still sat through the blacks. Then, click, a light went on . . . I like to think I had something to do with that. Coming back from film, it struck me as ridiculous to go moving back and forth around the stage, when in film the actors are capable of sustaining a performance even though they are shooting out of sequence. Most of our actors also work in film and are quite familiar with that technique. And everybody said, let's try it that way. So we started taping out of sequence, and now other soaps are copying us. They saw that we were coming in at six and leaving at four, while they were coming in at eight but leaving at nine or ten at night. They're copying us, and finding that it works. So you see it's something that has evolved. You learn from each other. I think working in film teaches you better ways to do tape, and hopefully, vice versa.

As a matter of fact, film people are coming in and watching us and they're impressed to see that we integrate everything at one time – the show is scored, and it has sound effects, and optical effects, wipes, dissolves, fadeouts. Film is not done that way. In film, sound effects, music, opticals, *etcetera*, are all done in post-production. Post-production for a film can take weeks – another reason why film is more expensive. They marvel at the fact that we can have all of those things in our composite, completed picture when we walk out of one day's shooting and a few hours' editing.

* *Read: Fifty-eight minutes, twenty-four seconds.*

* *black: no television picture; a dark screen.*


VIM
Dash
Soilax
AJAX
Tide
IVORY SNOW
trend
55¢
DUZ
COLD WATER
AJAX
LUX
cheer
Fab
vel
20¢
RINSO
LUX
BORAX
vel

Unit 4 Selling

Put a tiger in your tank . . .
It's the real thing . . .
I can't believe
I ate the whole thing . . .
It's a white tornado! . . .
We do it all for you . . .
Ring around the collar! . . .
Look, Ma, no cavities! . . .
You're in good hands . . .
How do you spell relief? . . .
You've come a long way, baby . . .
Stronger than dirt . . .
Have it your way . . .
Do you know me? . . .
Fly the friendly skies . . .
Fly me . . .
You'll wonder
where the yellow went . . .
Does she, or doesn't she? . . .
Plop plop, fizz fizz,
oh, what a relief it is . . .
It takes a licking
and keeps on ticking . . .
My wife, I think I'll keep her . . .
Grab for the gusto . . .
We are driven . . .

– Familiar phrases and slogans from television commercials, 1955-1979

Through constant repetition of images, catchy phrases, and music, television commercials weave themselves into our culture. The brief messages above are generally familiar to almost everyone who watches TV. There are, of course, many others.

Activity 1 The Language of Selling

In a short time – five minutes or so – see how long a list of familiar television commercial phrases you can make. Read your list aloud in class and listen to the lists your classmates have made. Count the number of times any one phrase is repeated. Do most of your classmates have the same phrases you do? If so, why might that be? If not, why not?

The television commercial, the largest single source of income for networks and stations, may be entertaining or irritating, but it is rarely dull. Jonathan Price, in his book *The Best Thing on TV: Commercials*, explains why:

Culturally, commercials have trained our eye to accept fast cuts, dense and highly paced imagery, very brief scenes, connections that are implied but not spelled out – in brief, a new style of visual entertainment.

Historically, we see commercials more often than the shows (the same spot may be run six to sixty times a season), and we recall them in more detail, often with more fondness. People feel great nostalgia for the White Knight, the Green Giant, Speedy Alka-Seltzer, Tony the Tiger, Snap, Crackle and Pop – these are the elves of our country's imagination.

Financially, commercials represent the pinnacle of our popular culture's artistic expression. More money per second goes into their making, more cash flows from their impact, more business thinking goes into each word than in any movie, opera, stage play, painting, or videotape. If commercials are artful, then the art is objective, not subjective; capitalist, not rebellious; part of a social activity rather than a personal search for expression; more like a Roman road than a lyric poem. Their beauty is economic.

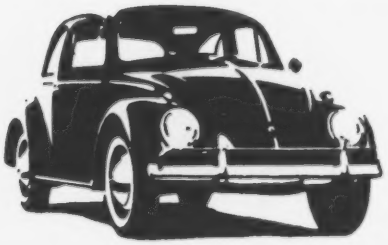
Yes, some are dumb. Some guy leaning out of the screen to yell at us because we supposedly tried to make him change beers just makes us hate Schlitz. People going gaga when they walk into a bank, just because the bank accepts savings accounts, make me gag. But then I don't love Lucy much. And I'm glad Gilligan has to stay on his island.

Commercials are not all superb. But the best are lively, very American mini-dramas, tiny films, high-speed epics. Taken as a whole, commercials offer a rough catalogue of our consumer economy and a wild tour of our unconscious fantasies.

The thirty-second television commercial, particularly the one that is broadcast nationally, is indeed a special product. A very expensive ad may cost as much as $100 thousand to produce (although the average is much lower), and , if it is aired during a highly rated program like the Super Bowl game, it may cost another $250 thousand to be shown just once. On the other hand, broadcasting a thirty-second commercial on a small local station early in the morning may cost as little as fifteen dollars. A typical commercial may eat up a hundred feet of movie film during production for every foot that is used in the final print. And advertisers may spend $50 thousand on research just to see if their ideas work. Despite the costs, television advertising must be working: there just isn't enough commercial time on the air for all the companies that want to advertise. In other words, it's currently a "seller's market."

A History of Advertising

Over the last twenty-five years or so, television advertising has changed significantly in several ways. In the early 1950s, almost all programs were fully sponsored. That is, one advertiser paid for the whole show, usually had something to say about its content, and occasionally oversaw the making of the entire program. The viewing public closely associated the name of the sponsor with the program. In some cases, the sponsor even lent its name to the show's title, as in these 1953 prime time programs: *Revlon Mirror Theater, U.S. Steel Hour, Phillip Morris Playhouse, Pabst Blue Ribbon Fights, Rheingold Theater, Philco-Goodyear Playhouse.* The ads themselves were usually performed live, often by one of the program's stars or by the host. Within a short time, however, advertisers became unhappy with the high risks of doing live commercials, so they turned to the greater safety of film.



In the 1960s, commercials became more sophisticated, surprising people with their cleverness and humor. The nation was at that time enjoying a healthy economy. Companies felt free to pour more money into promoting their products, and TV was *the* mass medium for getting their messages across. Advertisers started to experiment with new approaches to selling. The Volkswagen ad campaign, for example, was notably successful. In it the Volkswagen beetle was portrayed as the humble alternative to the big American car. Yes, the VW was small, homely-looking, and lacking in "sex appeal," but it was also inexpensive and reliable. This approach was known as the *soft sell.* The Volkswagen campaign was so successful that many other commercials began to follow its lead.

Over the years fewer and fewer programs were fully sponsored. It was becoming far too expensive for any one advertiser to support an entire program week after week. By the 1970s no regularly scheduled network programs were paid for solely by one sponsor. More and more people were watching television, which increased the cost of a minute of commercial air time. Advertisers turned in greater numbers to the *participating spot*, a single commercial on a network program. Advertisers

were also becoming more particular about the programs with which they were identified: it was to their advantage to seek programs with the same demographics* as their desired market.

* *demographics: broadly, statistics about a given population.*

The booming economy of the 1960s gave way to inflation and recession by 1970. Money was tight. People were buying less. Manufacturing slowed down, and workers were laid off. Companies reduced expenses by cutting their promotion budgets, and the first promotional fat to be trimmed was the television commercial. Up to this time the sixty-second commercial had been something of an institution, but advertisers learned that they could get their message across in only thirty seconds with only slightly reduced impact for half the cost of a full minute. They began to apply pressure on the networks for the right to air more half-minute ads.

The networks were at first unhappy about this trend, for it required them to go out and seek many more advertisers for the same number of available minutes. But in 1970, as Les Brown points out in his book *Television: The Business Behind the Box*, the economy forced the networks to change their minds:

. . . in early December the sales outlook was so poor that CBS was driven to a desperate step. At the urging of sales vice-president Frank Smith, the network established that its minimum unit of sale would be thirty seconds instead of one minute. The other networks had no choice but to follow, and within a period of days the thirty-second commercial became the new industry standard.

It had the immediate effect of lubricating the market, but even as purchasing activity became accelerated, there was the melancholy sense at all three networks that the wave of business for the available network positions from January through March was a short-term enjoyment they would spend the rest of the year regretting. For the action that CBS initiated was like a department store sale that . . . became . . . part of the business.

By the end of the 1970s, the one-minute commercial on network television had all but become extinct, giving way to the much more cost-effective thirty-second commercial. For the networks, selling available commercial time was no problem, for advertisers scrambled for desirable time slots and highly rated shows with appealing demographics. The networks were also still able to sell all available time for less successful programs, although at lower costs.

For advertisers, the challenge of the short commercial is, of course, to load it with as much impact as possible. At an average cost to advertisers of roughly $600 a second (the 1978 rate for network commercials), every second is crucial. Not a single frame of film or tape can be wasted.

When you are watching a television commercial, you are looking at the most carefully polished presentation that television has to offer. What kind of work, what kind of preparation and creative planning go into the making of a network television ad? Richard Prince, vice-president of the advertising firm N W Ayer ABH International in New York, recently talked about the 1978 development of a campaign for 7-Up:

"No commercial is created out of a vacuum. It all comes out of a general marketing plan for a product in a process that we call *positioning*. With 7-Up the marketing people establish the best market for the product: who's most likely to buy it and therefore what the best appeal to that market will be. For example, after analyzing the drinkers of all lemon-lime soft drinks, we created a number of advertising programs, tested them, and found that an appeal to outdoor, active people would be most successful. These are the people who buy this kind of drink, so at this point you position 7-Up as the drink for those kinds of people by demonstrating it on commercials. You have a unique "offering," as we call it, *vis-à-vis* your competitors . . .

"In making the commercial for television, you take whatever advertising theme you have, like "The world is turning up for 7-Up" or "America's turning up for 7-Up," doing a lot of other outdoor things, "living it up" with 7-Up. You establish that you'll do three or four commercials in an outdoor setting. You get the copy writers and art directors to make a storyboard, and you plan it out.

"Now people say that commercials often look better technically than the programs around them. The reason for that is that you are usually talking about a thirty-second unit . . . when you buy a minute's participation in a program, you buy two units of thirty seconds each. You get the same audience with thirty seconds that you do for a minute, and its costs a little bit less, both in time and production costs. So you shrink your message down to thirty seconds. That requires discipline. It means you can't waste one mini-second . . . you must get as much information in there as possible. Even though it may be played a hundred times, the audience must remember the commercial, and once they've remembered it, they also have to *comprehend* the message. So you have to compress everything into thirty seconds of words and pictures, remembering that you are in competition with all the other commercials, not only on all television but on the particular program you're participating in. You won't have another soft drink commercial right next to you (the networks won't do that to you), but you may have another soft drink commercial a half-hour later. So that's why you work harder to make everything perfect.

"Once you've done the shooting – and you may shoot more than twenty feet of film for every foot that you use so you get the perfect shot – you go into editing, where you do your visual effects: different kinds of dissolves and fast cuts. You might have a lot of trick photography which involves "matting" – the process of putting together two pictures so that if a guy is standing on top of a mountain drinking a can of 7-Up, he may be standing on a rock in the park, but in the background you see the Alps."

Activity 2

Positioning

See Reading 4.1., "Overdirected" and **See Reading 4.3,** "HEY! Dear Reader . . ."

Using the concept that *positioning* is the technique of presenting a product so that it seems uniquely different from competing products, create a product, give it a name, and invent a "position" for it. What will make the product distinct from competing products? How will its appeal and its marketability be special?

Prepare a brief description of the product and its "positioning."

How Messages Persuade

Commercials are designed to persuade you to a certain point of view. Sometimes an advertiser will try to convince you of something very specific; for example, that Rocket Oven Cleaner is easier and faster than any other. Sometimes the message is more subtle: if you wear Fiji Fantasy Cologne, you will meet the love of your life. Occasionally, ads don't seem to say anything at all in particular, but instead simply present positive images and impressions of a company or business. However obvious or subtle the message, each ad is created with a specific purpose in mind.

Because most commercials are only thirty seconds long, the advertiser must grab your attention as fully and as quickly as possible and try to hold it for the length of the ad. A few persuasive techniques are well known to advertisers:

The Emotional Appeal. The advertiser presents scenes that appeal to our emotions, to our love of family and country: a reunion with Grandma at the airport; a child romping with puppies; a photo album full of memories and nostalgia; American life shown only through its beauty and blessings – in other words, ads built around the kinds of things that stir the blood and soften the heart.

The Testimonial. The advertiser hopes that if Henry Fonda, O. J. Simpson, or Catherine Deneuve believe in the product, everyone else will also. The appearance of celebrities in a commercial is also an attention-getting device. We're not likely to forget the sight of a football hero running through airport lobbies.

The Everyday-Person Testimonial. "Just folks" choose between competing products, or praise the virtues of products they like. A recent ad campaign for Wheaties ("The Breakfast of Champions") showed everyday people eating the cereal. A typical ad would close with the words, "Wheaties, Breakfast of . . . Joe." The appeal is obvious: if your neighbor likes a product, you probably will, too. As "everyday" as these people appear to be, however, they are paid handsomely for their performances every time the commercial is aired.

The Dramatization. Within half a minute at many times throughout the broadcast day and night, viewers are given front row seats for a number of very compact dramatic programs with the same plot and theme: with soiled shirt in hand, a husband approaches his wife to complain about her

inability to do the laundry. The wife looks distraught. A neighbor (or magical figure like the White Knight, Mr. Clean, the Man from Glad) appears to instruct the wife to use _____, which will really clean that shirt. The next day, the husband appears in a spotless shirt, praising the cleaning job, and the wife smiles knowingly.

The Demonstration/Comparison. Products are shown in action or are compared to similar products manufactured by competitors. Risky as the latter approach may seem, it is a good way to hold the viewer's attention as well as to make a point about the superiority of one's own product over another.

There are many other ways advertisers can try to attract your attention and persuade you to a certain point of view. Consider:

- "_____ detergent makes your clothes smell fresher, stay clean longer."
- "_____ contains aspirin, and more than 70 percent of doctors interviewed recommended aspirin as an effective pain reliever."
- "_____ (a dog food) contains meat by-products, beef, and balanced nutrition."

Each of the above examples can be considered misleading. In the first instance, the words "fresher" and "longer" are used without comparison to any other product; this results in what is known as an *incomplete comparative*. In the second, the statement says only that most of the doctors *who agreed to be interviewed* recommended that aspirin was a good pain reliever. The doctors said nothing about the advertised product itself, nor does the commercial tell you how many doctors were actually involved. In the third case "balanced nutrition" may well mean that there is a large assortment of cereals and grains in the dog food, although the statement seems to imply that the dog food is mostly or entirely meat.

Notice that none of the advertisements above is an outright lie (the Federal Trade Commission, which regulates television commercials and is described more fully on page 78, forbids dishonesty in advertising). Nevertheless, each of the above commercials could easily be misinterpreted by the public.

Not long ago, one cola company decided to produce a commercial that would pit its cola against another cola by asking people to compare their tastes and select the better one. To do this, the cola company labled its product with the letter N and its competitor's with the letter Q. People were asked to drink some of each and then declare which one they liked better. Naturally, television viewers saw the public choose N over Q, for it was N's commercial. The competing cola company protested strongly, arguing that people chose N because the letter N itself is preferable to the letter Q. The N cola company responded to the protest by changing its competitor's letter to S, and its own to L. Interestingly enough, N (l) was still preferred as the better cola, despite the changes. Yet the competitor made a good point: if one assumes that the two colas were

similar in taste, many of the people testing them might have chosen primarily between two *letters* rather than between two *drinks*.

See Reading 4.3,
"In Conversation with Jim Fitts" ◆

Language can be manipulated to create unusual effects. Sometimes what we hear seems to be saying one thing when in fact it's saying something entirely different.

Activity 3

Evaluating Advertising Claims

A *fallacy*, according to the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, is "a deceptive, misleading, or false notion, belief, etc." Occasionally, advertisers try to argue on behalf of a product by using fallacies. For example:

In tests with BLEACH-O detergent, women preferred our product two-to-one over the next leading brand.

This statement may well be true, but the information it presents is incomplete and could be considered misleading. Can you explain what fallacies there are in this statement?

The visual part of a commercial can be just as misleading as its words. During the 1960s, when Americans indicated through their buying habits their preference for large automobiles, television commercials often used wide-angle camera lenses to give us misleading visual information – to suggest that the cars were longer and wider than they really were. Slow motion helps give a false impression of graceful movement. Shampoo commercials often use top-lighting to give a model's hair extra sheen. And the skillful splicing together of different camera shots can make us believe that a child's toy car runs faster or farther along the floor than it is really capable of doing.

Largely because of their potential for misleading the public, commercials are reviewed and censored more than anything else we see on television. To be broadcast over a network, a commercial must be acceptable to the Federal Trade Commission (see below), to the National Advertising Division (NAD) of the Council of Better Business Bureaus, and to the National Advertising Review Board (NARB). Ads must also be acceptable to the networks themselves, who establish their own advertising standards and enforce them when reviewing commercials for broadcast. In 1975, for instance, advertising censors at CBS rejected almost half the commercials submitted to them that compared one brand name to another. And the NARB reviewed a case in which, according to Jonathan Price in *The Best Thing on TV: Commercials*, someone complained about a television set manufacturer's claim that "Every color TV _____ makes is built right here in the U.S. by Americans like these." It happened that about 14 percent of the set's parts were made overseas, so the NARB successfully pressured the manufacturer to drop the ads. Although the NAD and the NARB are organizations created by the business community itself and have no real legal authority, they are considered important in establishing and monitoring guidelines for commercials.

The Federal Trade Commission

Most advertisers prefer to be guided by groups within the business community than to be regulated by the government. The Federal Trade Commission exists to deal with cases that are not satisfactorily handled by groups like the NAD or NARB. The FTC was formed in 1914, and empowered by a law passed in 1938 to prohibit deceptive advertising. It supports advertising as a means of providing product information to consumers. It believes that there should be no restraint of advertising. And it has long encouraged *comparative* advertising (as with colas N and Q, above) as a way to show consumers the relative merits and prices of similar products. In 1979, about 10 percent of all television commercials were comparative.

When advertising is false or blatantly deceptive, the FTC has the authority to act. In an advertising campaign during the 1970s, for example, the makers of Listerine claimed that their product was helpful as a remedy for the common cold. The FTC sued Listerine, asserting that this was not so. It had found that the mouthwash manufacturer falsely stated Listerine's ability to prevent, cure, or relieve the symptoms of the common cold, and ordered that the company broadcast corrective advertising renouncing its earlier claims. Listerine appealed to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, which upheld the FTC ruling. Listerine appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which refused to hear the case, allowing the FTC ruling to stand. As of 1979, Listerine's corrective ads were still being aired on television.

Activity 4

Visual Mockery

You've now read about many ways in which what we believe we see or hear in a commercial isn't actually what's being demonstrated to us. Here's another, from a news item, reprinted from the December 11, 1978, issue of *Advertising Age*:

Ad Mockups Not Forbidden, Westen Says

- *Washington* – The Federal Trade Commission's Tracy Westen chose mashed potatoes as his olive branch last week.
- Speaking to an advertising law conference, the No. 2 official in FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection promised that the commission staff is looking for ways to "ease burdens" and suggested the use of mockups in ads might be a starting point.
- Take mashed potatoes. They don't melt under camera lights, Mr. Westen said, while ice cream does.
- There may be "nothing wrong with mashed potatoes in an ice cream ad," he suggested, "as long as the copy doesn't talk about texture."

Other "mockups" (or simulations) have been used in past television commercials; for instance:

- molasses has been used to thicken and darken coffee, which can look thin and watery under studio lights;
- a fabric softener commercial shows the bottle being dropped on a pile of towels, which looks soft and bouncy, thanks to some hidden sponge rubber;

- in a hot studio, a glass of beer rapidly loses its foam, or "head." At times, detergent suds have been added to the beer to make it look more foamy.

If you worked for the Federal Trade Commission, you would have to take a position on some of these cases, which are all examples of mockups. What position would you take on this issue?

Wanting Versus Needing

Despite the various restrictions placed on advertisers by both the government and the business community, advertisers continue to try to persuade us through many different techniques both subtle and obvious to come around to their way of thinking.

Says advertising executive Richard Prince, "Our business is management – management of opinion for good or bad. Politicians manage public opinion . . . We, as advertisers, can manage consumer opinion – we can do it without a conscience, or we can do it with a conscience. There may be some villains in this business, and also a lot of people with integrity. But the basis of advertising is management of the public's needs and opinions.

"You have to be careful about reacting to advertising the way you do to any salesman. You have to recognize that no salesman is going to tell you the bad things about the product. He may not even *know* them. He's going to highlight the things in the product that he feels you want. And you have to decide: is it really all that important to spend that much money on a particular product . . ."

Public Service Announcements

Public service announcements (PSAs) are aired free of charge by a local station or network to promote a charity or a cause, to give important information, or to address a social concern. As a rule, the charity, government agency, or social group pays for and supervises the production of these messages, although on occasion the local station will produce an announcement as a service to a group that can't afford the expense.

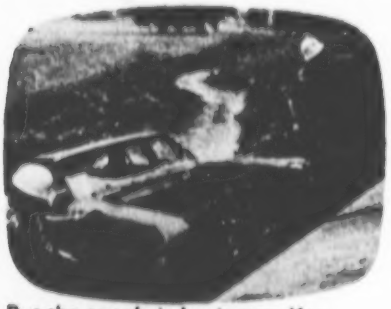
The Federal Communications Commission doesn't regulate the number or scheduling of PSAs. Every three years, however, when a station applies to the FCC to have its license renewed, the station is requested to verify its own PSA policy as part of its responsibility to serve the "public interest, convenience, and necessity." Interestingly enough, stations are asked to report the number of public service announcements they broadcast but not the amount of time given to them. Since television time is always worth money, most stations see economic sense in broadcasting many brief PSAs rather than fewer long ones. Some of these ads take only a few seconds and can be conveniently linked to the required hourly station identification announcement:

This is Channel 6, your election station.
If you're registered, vote.
If you're not registered, do so today.

Many PSAs reach a very small audience because they are aired during off-peak hours (early mornings and late evenings) when time is cheap and relatively difficult to sell to commercial advertisers.

In promoting a point of view, PSAs use the same techniques of persuasion that commercial ads use. Whether they are advocating safety with skateboards, the joy of reading, or the need for physical exercise, all PSAs seek to cause an impact on the audience. The example below, from the "Keep America Beautiful" campaign, plays effectively upon our emotions.

In America, abandoned cars litter the land.



But the people in Lexington, Kentucky, are removing 100 of them a month.

We discard millions of used tires.

But in New Jersey, they're turning old tires into playgrounds for children.

Our streets and countryside have become our dumping grounds for trash.

But all across America, people are now recycling 8 million tons of it a year.

We create staggering amounts of garbage.

But in Virginia Beach, they turned a mountain of garbage into a recreational hillside.

Pollution is destroying our beachfronts and waterways.

But in Huntington, Long Island, they're planting sea grass which cleanses the water for wildlife and man.

The cure for pollution is people. Working together.

For a brochure on what you can do, write Keep America Beautiful.

Photos courtesy of The Advertising Council

Political Commercials and Editorializing

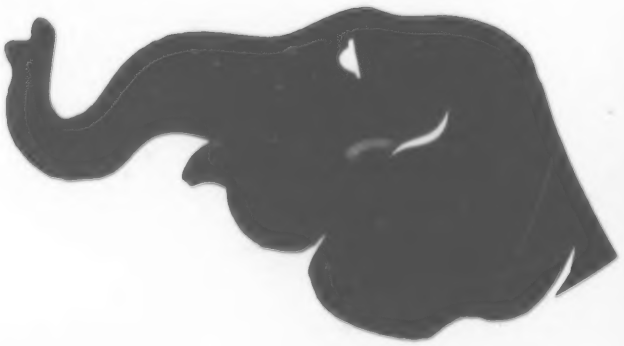
Candidates for public office have used television increasingly over the years to sell themselves to people. By law, stations must sell time to candidates at the lowest possible advertising rate, just as long as the candidates appear personally on the screen during the weeks preceding an election. Under the Equal Time Law (see Unit 2) all other political candidates, if they so request and if they fulfill the same personal appearance requirement, must be given the same amount of time on television at the same rates.

It wasn't until 1949 that radio and television stations were allowed to broadcast their own editorials for or against a political candidate or issue. Whenever a station editorial criticizes an individual or organization, the station must notify the person or group that the criticism has been made, and it must offer them a reasonable chance to reply. These regulations encourage television to present full and balanced opinions on issues and candidates.

Political commercials use many of the same persuasion techniques used to advertise products. Since it is impossible for a single thirty-second ad to present a political issue in any detail or depth, candidates usually use their television time for other purposes: to make themselves familiar to the public, to convey image and personality, to present brief arguments on issues. The 1972 Presidential campaign, for instance, featured heavy television advertising by both Richard Nixon and George McGovern. The two commercials reprinted here from *The Unseeing Eye* by Thomas E. Patterson and Robert D. McClure are particularly good examples of how advertising can persuade.

The Nixon commercial on the next page attacked George McGovern's defense spending proposals:

Video	AUDIO
Toy soldiers, planes, and ships	*VOICEOVER:* The McGovern defense plan. He would cut the Marines by one third, the Air Force by one third. He'd cut Navy personnel by one fourth. He'd cut interceptor planes by one half, the Navy fleet by one half, and carriers from sixteen to six. Senator Hubert Humphrey has this to say about the McGovern proposal: "It isn't just cutting into the fat. It isn't just cutting into manpower. It's cutting into the very security of this country."
Portion of toy soldiers being swept off screen	
Portion of toy planes being swept off screen	
Portion of toy ships being swept off screen	
Script of Humphrey quote	
President aboard ship moving through the sea	President Nixon doesn't believe we should play games with our national security. He believes in a strong America to negotiate for peace through strength.
[Mandatory disclaimer]: Sponsored by Democrats for Nixon.	*VOICEOVER:* Democrats for Nixon.



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George McGovern

Here are excerpts from a McGovern commercial:

Video	Audio
	McGOVERN: Joel, were you with the Third Marines at . . .
McGovern and veterans in a group	*VOICEOVER:* Most of them were still safe in grade school when this man first spoke out against the war – risking political suicide in the hope they might be spared. For them, his early voice has now been heard too late. If the shooting stopped tomorrow, they still have to face their long road back rebuilding shattered lives and broken dreams and are looking for all the help and understanding they can find . . .
Close-up of veteran in wheelchair	*ONE VETERAN:* Why can't we get jobs in government offices right now, they should be the ones that would hire us first. They hire other people. There are people who have disabilities – stuck in these things – and they don't want to be here. Some of them can't use their arms and their fingers but that doesn't make them a nonproductive individual.
◆ McGovern talking to wheelchaired veteran	*McGOVERN:* You love your country, there's no question about that, yet you're about half way mad at it too, aren't you. . . .

See Readings 4.4 and 4.5, both of which have to do with political advertising.

Activity 5

Political Persuasion

When they were broadcast in the fall of 1972, both these commercials were highly regarded for their persuasive techniques. Examine each one closely and decide how each, in its own way, is an effective advertisement. Does each commercial use "positioning"? What persuasive techniques are being used?

Reading

4.1 *A fast-paced commercial is often given its pace in the editing room, as we see below, when hours-worth of film are chopped up and orchestrated into a half-minute waltz. Notice that advertising agencies like to title their commercials, as with this McDonald's spot called "Ice Nine."*

Overdirected

by Jonathan Price
from *The Best Thing on TV: Commercials*
The Viking Press, 1978

. . . Dan Nichols . . . was creative director of the McDonald's account for Needham, Harper & Steers when they decided that the old song "You Deserve a Break Today" had become shopworn. He and his boss spent two weeks out of phone contact with the rest of the world, locked in the Drake Hotel. They came up with a dozen different campaign ideas, each with its own song. There was one that everyone at the ad agency loved. Everyone hated "You, you're the one." But Nichols liked it. "The reason I was in love with it was that it was so simplistic, it was so blatantly directed at the consumer."

Nichols' involvement with the writing allows him to plan the high volume of scenes in his spots; in one sixty-second McDonald's spot, he showed sixty-five scenes, and in most spots he crams in fast cuts, zooms, and reverses. For one commercial about McDonald's take-out food, called *Ice Nine*, he figured out sixty-four potential snow scenes and listed them in categories. Under "Downhill Skiing," for instance, he listed these shots:

1. Aerials of skis, flip, spread eagles, layouts, crossing
2. Ski race start at timing gate
3. High-speed powder skiing
4. High-speed slalom
5. Mogul head bops
6. Kite
7. Ski jump (high speed)
8. 36-degree pole swings
9. Cross-country skiing
10. Hot dogging . . . ballet

After that ten seconds, we go on to look at ice skating, snow chores, sledding, snow romps, snow school, snow sports, picnickers in the snow eating McDonald's take-out food, and girls indoors, "nice and warm."

One McDonald's spot is titled *Quick Cuts*, and that is Nichols' style. To be seen and recognized in half a second, each scene must be clear, well-lit, and carefully planned. If we pan left in one scene, we often pan right in the next; if we are moving forward for one second, we may pull back in the next. His editing establishes a rhythm of movement: two stills, a move forward, a move back, a still, then the camera holds still while someone moves past it to the right, then back to the left. He uses frozen frames like dotted notes, or syncopation, holding one image for a while so that the next one is more sharply emphasized. They mark the end of one sequence of ski sports, the beginning of ice hockey scenes; they give us a rest. In another one, each frozen frame shows us a person, the target of the song, "You, you're the one." Nichols comments, "My formula is energy. You have to keep it going."

4.2 *Are irritating commercials successful or not successful? Why or why not?*

HEY! Dear Reader, May We Have a Word With You? About Commercials

by Richard K. Doan
TV Guide
January 14, 1967

Are you no longer swept off your feet by the white tornado? Is that bad breath routine about to drive you batty?

In short, do you pine for fast, fast relief from those deadly familiar commercials? And does it seem to you that advertisers ought to know it when they're rubbing your fur the wrong way time after time, day after day, night after night, week after week – yes, even year after year?

Relax. They know what they're doing. And – honest! – they don't mind irritating you. Not, at least, as long as they're getting *through* to you. Not as long as you remember their brand, and buy it.

You say you wouldn't buy that brand if you were starving to death and it would save your life? It matters not. You must be in a minority. The experts say it doesn't work that way. Most people will buy a highly competitive product if they think it best even if its TV advertising rubs them raw. Take Madison Avenue's word for it. The boys there aren't laboring to make you love them. All they want to do is sell you.

They have no rules about how long a TV commercial or selling theme shall run. Sometimes a spot's longevity is determined simply by how much the sponsor has, or wants, to spend. Sometimes, as with cold remedies, it's a seasonal pitch. Sometimes, as with the unveiling of new-model cars, it's a passing event.

More often the determining factor is how well a commercial sells. As one Madison Avenue expert put it: "Especially in the drug field, an advertiser may get what he considers a satisfactory commercial and spend against it almost to the end of time."

The Aerowax people, for instance, liked the gimmick of machine-gun bullets spattering off "jet-age plastic" so well that they kept this theme going for four years.

"One reason you'll see a commercial repeated over and over," explained John Bergin of the Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn ad agency, who created the successful Dodge Rebellion campaign and who's also involved in selling Pepsi-Cola, "is that the cost of producing commercials has skyrocketed in recent years. It's running up to $50,000 [and sometimes even more] to film a single minute. If Hollywood spent proportionately as much for movies, every one of them would be a 'Cleopatra'!"

But how does an advertiser know when his spot has run its course? Judging by what the agency oracles say, nobody

has anything resembling a pat answer.

Suggested Paul Gerhold of the J. Walter Thompson company: "When people stop talking about your commercial, it's time to pull it off."

Sponsors Check on Spots

Huge sums are regularly spent by the sponsors and their agencies trying to find out whether people are "talking about" their TV spots. This is done by so-called follow-up interviewing of householders, usually by phone or by door-to-door canvassing.

It may come as a shock to many viewers, but these surveys seldom bother to elicit feelings of irritation engendered by a sales pitch. That just isn't considered important.

"Some of the most irritating commercials have been the most successful," says Richard A. R. Pinkham, whose Ted Bates agency has been noted for some of the hardest sells in TV (for Anacin, Carter's Pills, among others). He assured an inquirer that if he and his agency had any such selling job to do over again, "we'd do it just the same way."

Frank Kemp at the Compton agency, who oversees campaigns for such products as Tide, Gleem, and Ivory soap, sided with Pinkham's viewpoint. "Nearly everybody supposedly hates those commercials," he remarked regarding a well-known headache remedy's spots, "but they sell. The point is, we're not trying to make people love us; we're only trying to sell."

Pinkham, incidentally, claimed it is more often the sponsor himself rather than the TV audience "who gets bored first with a commercial. We sometimes have a problem keeping him, not the audience, from getting irritated by it," he reported. He declined to identify any of his clients who have begged for relief from their own ads.

Perhaps the most surprising part of all, however, is the fact that the billion-dollar advertising business has no clear picture yet of the impacts of repetitious selling.

The Schwerin Research Corporation, an outfit that has spent years probing the subject, confessed recently in a report on "The Economics of Wear-Out": "The life cycle of a television commercial is a difficult phenomenon to chart or even to comprehend."

Studies suggest, the firm said, that "the incessant drip" of repeated commercials "evidently splashes off more than it soaks in," possibly because consumer resistance hardens as the pitch gets more familiar or because the commercial has done all the convincing it's going to.

But nobody really knows what massive doses of advertising are doing to TV watchers, according to Schwerin.

"What happens," the researcher wondered, "when the consumer is exposed to a thousand advertising impressions a day – when he may be exposed to the same piece of advertising several times a day – when he is liable to see it again and again for months or even years – and when he is simultaneously exposed to more or less the same competitive claims in the product field?"

Viewers may not have a scientific answer to that one, but they might give Mr. Schwerin some choice opinions.

4.3 In Conversation with Jim Fitts

Effective television advertising appeals to the emotions and the intellect of the audience which receives its message. To Jim Fitts, a senior art director at Hill, Holiday, Connors and Cosmopulos, an advertising firm in Boston, television advertising is a craft. What are Jim Fitts's requirements for a good television commercial?

How the Commercial Happens

In conceiving a commercial for television, we're given guidelines from the client explaining what he wants and what the objective of the commercial is. The "we" I'm speaking of includes the copywriter and the art director, who work as a team to develop a commercial which they feel will best capture the viewer's attention and get the client's message across.

There are some "givens." Because television is a medium of images, you're working with – although some might dispute this – about seventy-five percent visual and twenty-five percent verbal communication. Music is another important component. The art director or copywriter doesn't sit down and bang away at a piano until one of them finds the theme; they hire a music production house to do that. Most commercials on a large budget have original music. A line like "We do it all for you" is mostly conceived by the advertising agency and then fed to the production house's arrangers and lyricists who will come up with music to fit the concept. Most national campaigns will also be tested. McDonald's will make five to ten commercials for every one seen on the air, and if they don't meet a certain viewer response or viewer retention factor when tested, they just won't appear on the screen.

The way the art director and copywriter usually generate ideas is to sit in a room where they hopefully won't be disturbed – although that almost never happens – and examine the problem they have to solve. Since they are both consumers, they know what it feels like to pick and choose products. With that in mind, they come up with twenty or a hundred and twenty ideas, or whatever it takes. Of these, there's usually only one that's right, only one that really has spark to it. You know it. You can feel it when you've got a really good idea. It solves all the problems. It's something that you think you might like to see on television. It's exciting. It's fresh. It's not mundane and it won't bore the daylights out of the viewers.

That's the big part of the success of a television commercial: getting viewers' attention so they remember the product. Get the audience to watch it, and whether they like it or hate it, they're going to remember the client. Look at Mr. Whipple. Everybody who has ever seen that commercial hates Mr. Whipple, but they go out and buy Charmin anyway. In fact, Charmin has become one of the top bathroom tissue products in the country because of that man. People dislike him, but they remember him, and because they remember him, when they're in the supermarket, they're going to grab the product.

While it's not necessarily true that what people like to see is going to make them buy, I do think it's true when you're showing a product that gives them a good feeling, like Coca-Cola or Pepsi. If you feel good, and if you can associate with those beautiful people jumping around on the screen and having a wonderful time, then you're going to want to have a Coke or a Pepsi.

Or ice cream . . . now there's a very sensuous, sellable product. It has richness, cool taste, flavor, color and texture. It makes you feel good and it's a great relief on a hot day. There are a lot of foods like that. Anything that's sweet and tastes wonderful is sensual. We keep that in mind, but we don't have to show beautiful men and women eating it and having a wonderful time. That's all implied. The very nature of showing ice cream on a dish, its color, shape and texture makes it a very sensuous thing to look at.

Obviously, it's not the same for bathroom tissue. So there are a lot of other devices, like Mr. Whipple, that get people to buy products.

In designing a commercial, you must keep certain things in mind. First of all, a commercial is really a little thirty-second movie, and you have only that half-minute to put your message across. It should be interesting. You're telling a story which should be a gem unto itself, so that people who see it, whether they are familiar with your product or have just stepped off Mars and onto Earth, should be able to understand immediately what you're trying to do and trying to sell.

Secondly, because of time limitations, you know that the characters in this movie have to be simple enough for viewers to identify and understand immediately. If someone is supposed to be humorous, you don't have four or five minutes to get your audience involved in the character so that they can understand that he or she is humorous. You have to have the character do something overtly funny in the first five seconds to make the point. In some respects, you have to stereotype a lot of the characters. It's very hard to portray a modern American feminist properly in thirty seconds. You would have to stereotype her and have her say something that might seem like an incredible cliché to a large number of viewers.

In shooting a commercial, I try to keep "cuts" to a minimum [a cut being a splice from one sequence to another]. In terms of time, I try to keep everything immediate, so that the viewer experience is as close to a thirty-second, live piece of theater as possible. Sometimes you can't do that; sometimes you have to span a hundred years in thirty seconds. But I like the immediacy of somebody watching thirty seconds of live action. I also keep color very much in mind when developing and shooting a commercial. The use of color is very important in television. In terms of what you're selling, the choice of background – red as opposed to green, for example – will completely change viewers' disposition about what they are seeing.

Also I like action and I like using people. I think commercials with people involve viewers more quickly than commercials without people. I work with a script, but sometimes I will just tell the actors, "All right, forget what the script says. How do you feel? Give me some lines, let's see something absolutely fresh." Sometimes, great little pieces of theater come from that. So, as you can see, there's a mixture of the planned – that is, getting on film what you intended – and the spontaneous – that is, what happens on the set.

There are two ways of shooting a commercial. You can shoot it on film and you can shoot it on videotape. I work mostly in film, film being a much better medium for commercials than tape. The advantage of using tape is that it's less expensive and more immediate. Ten seconds after you've shot something, you can see what it looks like, and you can edit it immediately. You can't do that with film. You never really know what you're going to get until the film is processed. It's usually four to five weeks from the time that you shoot a commercial until the time you receive a finished print of a film. With tape, of course, you can have a complete commercial in a couple of days if you want.

But film allows you a subtlety with lighting that tape does not, and a much better, sharper looking image. If you're

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trying to sell something on its looks, you choose film over tape. Tape has come a long way in the last ten years; but when I see a taped commercial, it looks like a television soap opera. It seems to lack warmth, and I just can't get that out of my mind.

Commercials today are made with one objective in mind: to sell a product or a service. There aren't any set rules or guidelines because every product is different – therefore, each commercial is different. Your aim as a creator of commercials is to make each one you do look as good as you possibly can. You want to make a good impression. Certainly, that's a normal motivation for anyone, and a healthy one. You try to make your room as neat as possible at home. You try to look your best when you go out on a date, and that's the same idea behind shooting a commercial. If you're going to spend a lot of money to put your product on television, why not show its best attributes?

You know, a lot of people say they hate advertising. Personally, I don't see selling as bad. We are working in a democracy. We produce goods. For the economy to continue, people have to buy goods. Advertising helps to sell them. Many people feel oversaturated by the "Buy me, buy me, buy me" message, but that's not necessarily the problem. It may not be advertising *per se*, but rather the number of commercials on television today. It's the viewer's responsibility to write television stations and networks and tell them, "You're oversaturating me with these commercial messages. I don't like it and I'm not going to watch your television programs unless you cut down on the numbers." Being a consumer is a two-way street. You can react negatively as well as positively. If you let the companies that you buy products from know exactly how you feel about their products and about the way they sell them, they're going to respond. That's the only way that anything is going to change on television. If people object to Mr. Whipple, they should write Charmin. Television's not a one-way medium, and never should be. And neither is advertising.

As a consumer, you're part of the marketplace, and you're part of a democracy. You should use your rights and freedoms as an American. Let your feelings be known to the people that are making and advertising these products.

Be sure to give reasons. Don't get upset and say, "Mr. Whipple is an idiot," or "The White Knight is an idiot." Tell them why you feel that they're misrepresentations, or why you feel that they're negative to women or whatever, just as you would be angry at your boyfriend or girlfriend for saying something you feel is not fair. Be clear. These letters *are* passed on and *are* read.

4.4 *Art Buchwald, syndicated newspaper columnist, is widely known as one of our leading satirists. Here he takes a poke at the making of a political campaign commercial. What are the targets of his humor?*

Posing for the TV Eye

by Art Buchwald
from the *Los Angeles Times*
Oct. 31, 1978

Have your ever wondered how a political television commercial is made? Probably not, but I'm going to tell you anyway.

"Okay, everybody quiet on the set. Where's Sen. Nobody? All right, this commercial will show what a great family man you are. Put on this cardigan sweater and sit in that stuffed chair by the fireplace . . . Lady, you'll have to get out of here, I'm shooting a commercial."

"I'm the senator's wife."

"Oh yeh, well, we'll need you in this one. You can stay. Let's see, why don't we sit you next to the senator, looking at him with adoring eyes?"

"I've never done any acting before."

"Well, just pretend you're sitting next to Robert Redford or Paul Newman."

"Should I say anything to him in the commercial?"

"What do you want to say?"

"I just want to ask when I'll see him again. This is the first time I've had a chance to talk to him in two months."

"No, don't ask that. Just look at him as if he's the greatest guy in the world."

"It's not going to be easy."

"Well, fake it! Now, where are the kids?"

"I could only get two out of the four. Marsha and Larry wouldn't come."

"Why not?"

"Marsha's mad at her father, and Larry ran away from home two weeks ago."

"All right, we'll have to make do with two of the four. Put the kids on the rug at their Daddy's feet. Each kid could hug a leg."

"Children, the man wants you to sit at Daddy's feet and hug him."

"Which one's our Daddy?"

"The man sitting in the large chair wearing the cardigan sweater."

"If we hug him, will he hurt us?"

"No, children. This is for a TV commercial. He won't get mad at all."

"Quiet on the set. Where's the dog? I thought we were going to have the Senator's pet dog in this commercial?"

"Our dog ran away with Larry."

"Good grief! Somebody go out on the street and drag in a dog."

"What kind of dog, boss?"

"Who cares what kind of dog? Just so it will hold still till we get this thing shot. OK, Lady, now look at the senator. Please, no scowling . . . Could I have a smile? Not a bitter smile – a loving wife smile. Try to think of all the happiness you'll have when your husband gets elected. You're scowling again. All right then. Think how nice it will be if he gets defeated . . . That's better . . . Now you've got it. Kids, start hugging your Daddy's knees."

"I got the dog, boss."

"Okay. Throw him down by the fireplace. Senator, pretend this is what you do every night when you get home. You gather your family around you and read to them from the Constitution . . . Then look up and read whatever is on the teleprompter. You got it? Roll the cameras."

"Hi, I'm Sen. Nobody and this is my family. And this is my dog, Laddie. You may think politicians are different from

other people, but we're just plain folks like each one of you out there. We laugh, we cry, and we worry about the future of the country. I care about my family and my dog Laddie, and that's why I want you to vote for me on Election Day."

"Cut. We're going to have to do it again. Go out and find another dog that won't chew up the Constitution of the United States."

4.5 *The following is a series of notes written by Harry Treleaven, a media consultant for Richard Nixon during the 1968 Presidential campaign. They are reprinted here from* The Selling of the President 1968 *by Joe McGinniss. How does Harry Treleaven think television can effectively be used as a tool to sell a person rather than a product?*

Notes RE Nixon for President Advertising in the Primary Campaigns

by Harry Treleaven
excerpts from notes taken on November 21, 1967, as quoted in *The Selling of the President 1968*
by Joe McGinniss
Trident Press, 1969

Consider this the first stab at an advertising strategy – a combination guide and thought-starter for those who will be developing the Nixon for President advertising in the primary states . . .

. . .

We must start by answering three questions which are basic to all advertising:

– *What* do we want to communicate? This is the most important question. And once answered, *all* advertising should carry the same message, and be judged solely on how clearly and memorably it communicates it.

– *How* do we say what we want to communicate? With what words, what audio and visual techniques, in what style, what tone of voice?

– *Where* should we put our advertising message so that it will reach the most voters in the most effective way possible at the least cost? This is the media decision, and because it is a local problem it will be the subject of individual reports for each state . . .

. . .

Thus, the overall objective of the advertising will be to persuade voters, or confirm to the already-persuaded, that the Republican nominee in 1968 should be Richard Nixon, rather than Romney or Rockefeller or Reagan or Percy.

Issues will be discussed, but always in a way that clearly establishes Richard Nixon as the Republican candidate who is best equipped to deal with them.

. . .

It is part of the discipline of sound advertising to put down, as briefly as possible, the advertising "proposition" – the simplest expression of the message we want to communicate. This is not the theme or slogan; the words of the proposition may never appear in advertising; yet all advertising must communicate the thought of the proposition.

The proposition for the Nixon for President primary advertising can be stated like this:

There's an uneasiness in the land. A feeling that things aren't right. That we're moving in the wrong direction. That none of the solutions to our problems are working. That we're not being told the truth about what's going on.

The trouble is in Washington. Fix that and we're on our way to fixing everything. Step one: move LBJ out, move a Republican president in.

And of all the Republicans, the most qualified for the job by far is Richard M. Nixon. *More than any other candidate for the Presidency*, Richard Nixon will know what has to be done – and he'll know the best way to get it done. We'll all feel a whole lot better knowing he's there in Washington running things instead of somebody else.

The foregoing has been a discussion of *what* we want to communicate – or, in the case of the negatives, what we may want to counteract. It can all be summed up in the next to last sentence of the proposition:

More than any other Republican candidate for the Presidency, Richard Nixon will know *what* has to be done – and he'll know *the best way* to *get* it done.

It is imperative that this thought come through loud and clear in every single piece of advertising. If it doesn't, the advertising is not doing its job . . .

Wide World Photos

. . .

Think back to our typical Republican voter as he mentally eliminates the other candidates one by one. He *wants* to be for Nixon; all he needs is the kind of nudge he'd get from hearing that a lot of people he respects are also for Nixon. He needs assurance that his opinion will have acceptance, that he won't look like a loner, or a nut. Or, if he is still plagued by the old Nixon negatives, the fact that knowledgeable people all around him are swinging to Nixon could prompt him to say to himself, "Maybe I better reexamine my thinking. If all those people are for him, there's a chance I could be wrong . . ." etc. An endorsement is also an effective way of talking about the candidate in the third person; the endorser can say things quite naturally about the candidate that the candidate could not comfortably say about himself.

Of course, an endorsement could have a negative effect on a voter who doesn't like the endorser; this possibility can be minimized by always presenting more than one endorser (a series of six or seven or eight short endorsements in a TV commercial, for instance). This has the extra advantage of emphasizing the unifying and acceptability aspects of Richard Nixon – as well as creating a bandwagon impression.

Polls. These are really tabulated endorsements, and can have the same kind of "prior approval" effect described above. They can, moreover, be used to promote the idea that Richard Nixon can win nationally. As we said earlier, the best way to bury a reputation for losing is to start winning. Advertising favorable out-of-state poll results in New Hampshire (where the wasted vote is a real concern) might convince voters that when they vote for Richard Nixon they're backing a man who can go all the way.

About RN on TV. There's a school of thought that says keep him off the tube, it's not his medium, etc. In this writer's opinion, that's giving up too easily. We know we're going to use television; it's our most powerful medium. But to use it for a series of commercials which do not show the candidate, as has been suggested, would inevitably arouse suspicion. What're we hiding? So let's decide now that Mr. Nixon *will* appear in our paid television announcements and start figuring out the best ways to present him. A few thoughts:

The more informally he is presented the better.

He looks good in motion.

He should be presented in some kind of "situation" rather than cold in a studio. The situation should look unstaged, even if it's not. A newsreel-type on location interview technique, for example, could be effective. The more visually interesting and local the better.

Avoid closeups. A medium waist shot is about as tight as the camera should get. He looks good when he faces the camera head-on.

Still photographs can be effectively used on TV. Interesting cropping, artful editing and juxtaposition of scenes, an arresting sound track, can all combine to make an unusual presentation. Added advantages: there's a wide range of material to choose from, and we'd be free to select only the most flattering pictures.

For short programs (a series of nightly 5-minute shows during the final two weeks is being proposed for New Hampshire) a "town meeting" format should be considered. Each one could take place in a different local meeting place – school, store, fire house, home, etc. A group of thirty or forty people would be invited. The program could open with an exterior establishing shot, show Mr. Nixon entering, applause, then a few brief comments, a question and answer period, and closing remarks. A voice over announcer could handle the opening and sign off.

The matter of Mr. Nixon projecting more "warmth" and "humanness" has been discussed at great length. (This applies to all his public appearances as well as the advertising.) Presenting him informally as suggested above will help. Another suggestion: give him words to say that will show his *emotional* involvement in the issues. He is inclined to be too objective, too much the lawyer building a case, too cold and logical . . . . He should make more of a point of displaying his feelings, as well as his knowledge. It would also help if his choice of words and phrases was more colorful. He should be more quotable, use interesting and unusual labels, dynamic references – occasionally new similes or metaphors.

Wide World Photos

David Brinkley

Unit 5 That's The Way It Is? TV News

We reach a lot of people who don't really understand what news is. They don't understand what journalism is. They don't understand what a reporter is. They have the idea that when we put something on the air, it means we like it. It means we advocate it, support it, believe in it. They simply don't understand that our job is to tell what happened, whether we like it or not.

In all these attacks on the news media, there's one fact that tends to be forgotten. And that is that in numerous countries in the world the politicians have seized power and muzzled the press. But there is no country in the world where the press has seized power and muzzled the politicians. So if people are concerned about dangers to their liberties, they ought to know where these dangers come from, and they do not come from the press.

– David Brinkley*
as quoted by Saul Braun in "Brinkley on Brinkley – and Other Topics"
TV Guide, April 15, 1972

* *Prominent NBC newscaster.*

The typical half-hour network newscast is, in fact, only about twenty-three minutes long after time has been given over to commercials, opening titles, and closing credits. Within the confines of those twenty-three minutes, the newscast chooses, condenses, and airs the major stories of the day.

It has been said that all the copy from a half-hour newscast (the spoken part of the news) would take up much less than one page of a daily newspaper, and therefore may be thought of as a "headline service." Of course, television news supplements its "headlines" with visuals – film and videotape pictures that give us almost immediate access to events happening anywhere in the world. These pictures serve to inform us as well as to illustrate what is being spoken. And yet, a news item on television is hardly, if ever, as fully explored as it would be in the printed page of a newspaper.

In December 1976, CBS news correspondent Walter Cronkite addressed a convention of radio and television news directors, stressing his doubts that broadcast journalism could fully and fairly give its audience the news of the day. He cited what he felt to be the most serious problem with television news:

Photo by courtesy of CBS, Inc.

CBS News correspondent Walter Cronkite: "We are hitting our public with a series of blivets every night."

". . . the inadvertent and perhaps inevitable *distortion* that results through the hyper-compression we all are forced to exert to fit one hundred pounds of news into the one-pound sack we are given to fill each night. In World War II, a sack overstuffed to that degree was called a "blivet." We are hitting our public with a series of blivets every night.

"The cumulative effect is devastating, eating away at our credibility. Perhaps it will take a while for the masses to catch on – they are usually the last to know the truth . . .

"As we've seen, television is a medium that condenses its material to fit within the constraints of the schedule. The newscast is especially vulnerable to this kind of time compression."

In 1979, *TV Guide* reported that almost two-thirds of Americans get "most" of their news from television, and that a sizable percentage get *all* of their news from television. Such viewers run the risk of perceiving the events of the world purely in terms of how these events are reported on a nightly newscast. They run the additional risk of assuming that one network's news agenda includes all the major news stories of the day.

Network newscasts vary widely in the stories they present. Consider the following two lineups of stories from the *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* and the *NBC Nightly News*, both aired on February 8, 1979 (the date was chosen at random; the newscasts are offered here only as examples):

CBS	**NBC**
(with Roger Mudd, substitute for Walter Cronkite)	(with David Brinkley, Jessica Savitch)
1. *News Item:* Trouble in Iran, Khomeini vs. Bakhtiar	1. *News Item:* Carter's popularity falls to new low (according to NBC poll)
2. *News Item:* Israel/Egypt peace talks stalled	2. *News Item:* U.S. drops support of Nicaragua's President Somoza
Commercials:	
Rolaids – 30 seconds	
Sony Television – 30 seconds	
3. *News Item:* President Carter scolds foreign policy advisers for disloyalty	3. *News Item:* Leonard Woodcock named emissary to China
4. *News Item:* Andrew Young supports Iran's Khomeini	4. *News Item:* Trouble in Iran: Khomeini vs. Bakhtiar
5. *News Item:* Justice Department drops antitrust suit against ITT	5. *News Item:* U.S. reconsiders sale of computers to Russia for Olympics
	Commercials:
	Smoke detector – 30 seconds
	Sambo's Restaurant – 30 seconds
6. *News Item:* U.S. drops support of Nicaragua's President Somoza	6. *News Item:* Israel/Egypt peace talks stalled
Commercials:	
Nabisco – 30 seconds	
Jaguar – 30 seconds	
7. *News Item:* Social Security tuition benefits for college students questioned	7. *Video Only:* Stock Averages
	Commercials:
	Bufferin – 30 seconds
	Roman Meal Bread – 30 seconds
8. *News Item:* Lettuce pickers strike in California	8. "Segment 3" – mini-documentary story of Vietnam veteran with adjustment problems
	Commercials:
	Bird's Eye – 30 seconds
	Top Choice – 30 seconds

9. *News Item:* Court fight over Hare Krishna group's right to solicit in airports
   Commercials:
   Stove Top Stuffing – 30 seconds
   Green Giant – 30 seconds
10. *News Item:* Carter's China policy under fire
11. *News Item:* Russia, China build up weaponry in disputed areas
12. *News Item:* Mystery virus killing infants and toddlers in Naples, Italy
13. *News Item:* Reports of medical advances in treating/curing leukemia
14. *News Item:* Secretary Blumenthal foresees income tax cut by 1981
15. Stock Market Report
    Commercials :
    Miller Beer – 30 seconds
    Roman Meal Bread – 30 seconds
16. *News Item:* Gossip grows around circumstances of Nelson Rockefeller's death
    Commercials:
    Preparation H – 30 seconds
    Morton's/ITT – 30 seconds
    Closing Credits/Theme

"Teaser"
Commercial:
Pond's Cold Cream – 30 seconds

9. *"Briefly"* – News summaries:
   - Suit against ITT dropped
   - Major fire in Vienna
   - 16-year-old girl in Houston made deal with HEW Sec. Califano: if she quits smoking she gets free trip to Washington, D.C.
10. *News Item:* Strike at *London Times* causes hardship for some Britishers
    Commercials:
    Wonder Bond Glue, Borden – 30 seconds
    Icy Hot Heat Rub – 30 seconds
    End Theme (no credits)

Activity 1

"The News," February 8, 1979

1. Both newscasts featured approximately the same number of news items, although in different formats. How many news items were reported by both CBS and NBC? How many news items were reported in one newscast, but not in the other?
2. CBS aired ten commercials (five minutes total). NBC aired nine commercials (four and a half minutes total). Do you consider this an important difference? Why or why not?
3. Notice that the first, or "lead," stories in the two newscasts are different. What reasoning can you give for this discrepancy?
4. For discussion: Is your attitude toward network news influenced by your comparison of lineups? Give reasons for your answer.

See Reading 5.1, "In Conversation with Sandy Socolow"

We should not expect, of course, that one network newscast will duplicate the others, nor that it will necessarily even have the same lead story. Newspapers and magazines often stress different stories, for a variety of reasons. Still, on February 8, a person who had seen only the CBS broadcast and a person who had seen only the NBC broadcast would have distinctly different ideas about what the important news of the day was. And neither of them would have as complete a picture of the day's news as would someone who had read a good daily paper. Because of the need to fit a lot of news into a short time, each network naturally selects the news and features items that best reflect its own editorial choices. It is no wonder, then, that prominent television news professionals so strongly urge the public to read newspapers and magazines to get the details that television just can't supply.

Activity 2

Television News Versus Print News

Select a recent news story that has been covered by both TV and newspapers.

What are the differences in the way the story is dealt with in each medium? Write a simple statement of the facts in the story.

Then, as specifically as you can, describe how each medium presented the story. What are the differences and similarities in these presentations? Explain briefly what you think the impact of this story would be on 1) the TV audience, and 2) the newspaper's readers.

The Fairness Doctrine and First Amendment Rights of Broadcasters

As you may remember from Unit 2, broadcasters are required by the FCC's Fairness Doctrine to devote a reasonable amount of coverage to important public issues and to do so "fairly." However, print media (newspapers, magazines) are exempt from this kind of regulation. Print media seek special audiences, vastly smaller than the typical television audience. In choosing a particular newspaper or magazine from the many that are available, a person makes a deliberate choice of the kind of information and opinion he or she wants. Almost anybody with enough money and knowledge can try their hand at publishing a newspaper or magazine. The result is that there are thousands of newspapers and magazines available in this country, and each one can present its own version of information and opinion.

But that is not so with television. Because there are a limited number of frequencies available for broadcast use, and because three – only three – networks dominate the airwaves, television has a special responsibility to its audience: it has a unique obligation to use its power to provide news and information fully and fairly. Again, the FCC has no direct authority over the networks or their programming, but it does regulate what is broadcast by local stations. Therefore, network news as well as local news must adhere to the Fairness Doctrine.

Many network executives are unhappy with the Fairness Doctrine. They contend that through it the FCC could regulate news program content. Such regulation, they point out, would be a clear violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which provides that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging freedom of speech, or of the press . . ." Inasmuch as "the press" has come to include broadcast as well as print journalism, it is generally agreed that the Fairness Doctrine and the First Amendment are at odds with one another.

By the end of the 1970s, broadcasters were intensifying their complaints about the restrictions of the Fairness Doctrine. Some broadcasters say the Fairness Doctrine actually *restrains* them from producing public affairs programs that deal with especially controversial issues, because, they say, the angrier the debate is on a subject, the more difficult it is to convince the opposing sides that the issue was handled fairly. The result, broadcasters say, is that the Fairness Doctrine indirectly rewards the avoidance of difficult issues; it is much safer not to cover a volatile public issue at all than to cover it and then be accused of unfairness by both sides. Avoidance of such issues, however, clearly hampers television's responsibility to broadcast in "the public interest, convenience, and necessity."

In recent years television news itself has been the center of considerable controversy. As more and more people have watched the news, and as our nation's leaders and politicians have become increasingly visible on television, the debate began to intensify over the fairness of news coverage. During the Vietnam War, for example, network news organizations came under attack for being biased against the war and therefore against the administrations of Presidents Johnson and Nixon. At a Republican Party conference in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1969, Vice-President Spiro Agnew delivered an address that vigorously attacked network journalism as being unfair:

November 1969, Des Moines, Iowa: Vice-President Spiro Agnew attacks bias in news coverage. The speech unleashed a storm of controversy that continued for years.

"The purpose of my remarks tonight is to focus your attention on this little group of men who not only enjoy a right of instant rebuttal to every Presidential address, but more importantly, wield a free hand in selecting, presenting, and interpreting the great issues of our nation . . .

"The American people would rightly not tolerate this concentration of power in Government. Is it not fair and relevant to question its concentration in the hands of a tiny, enclosed fraternity of privileged men elected by no one and enjoying a monopoly sanctioned and licensed by Government? The views of the majority of this fraternity do not – and I repeat, not – represent the views of America."

However appropriate his remarks might or might not have seemed at the time, and however reasonable they may or may not seem to us now, they illustrate the degree to which news bias had become an issue by 1969. Charges like Agnew's are hard, if not impossible, to prove. They may be just as hard to disprove. Bias is often in the eye of the beholder. The content of a story, the commentator's tone of voice, even camera angle and lighting technique, can appear biased to one viewer while seeming perfectly unbiased to another.

Obviously, news cannot be all things to all people. What it can do, and what the networks say they are always striving to do, is to broadcast, as fully and fairly as possible, a variety of news stories that will be of the greatest interest to the greatest number of people. News, like any other programming, is a business that needs to deliver viewers to advertisers. And those viewers live in all parts of the country, hold widely different political beliefs, and come from broadly diverse cultural backgrounds.

See Reading 5.2, "Split-Second Decision"

Still, the content of a typical network newscast is subject to a variety of subtle and not-so-subtle pressures and controls. As we've seen, the twenty-three-minute time frame restricts not only the length of each story as broadcast, but also the number of stories that can be aired. Program producers, news correspondents, and occasionally the network news president must make constantly changing editorial decisions as the day progresses. The network president may also influence slight shifts in network news policy. In his book *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, Erik Barnouw points out that after Agnew's Des Moines speech, considerable political pressure from the White House was brought to bear on television news:

In several speeches, Agnew included reminders that television was "licensed" by government. Other government spokesmen echoed the theme. FCC Chairman Dean Burch, a recent Nixon appointee – and former campaign manager for Barry Goldwater – found the Agnew attack "thoughtful" and urged broadcasters to heed it. White House aide Clay T. Whitehead, who in 1970 became presidential adviser on "telecommunications policy," added a new note. Television stations could expect more security in their licenses, he suggested – he even mentioned the possibility of longer licenses – if they would be more careful about news programs and documentaries they accepted from the networks. He thus turned the affiliates against the networks. According to Walter Cronkite, the Nixon-Agnew-Whitehead era brought affiliate pressures on networks for a more cautious news policy. Some affiliates even superimposed disclaimers over network commentators. The networks themselves showed a sharply reduced interest in covering protest demonstrations.

The Agnew campaign received admiring tribute from the President's daughter Tricia. She said he had had "amazing" impact and helped television "reform itself." She added: "You can't underestimate the power of fear. They're afraid if they don't shape up –"

Some months later William Paley decided that CBS would drop "instant analysis" of presidential addresses. [This was restored shortly after Agnew's resignation.]

White House efforts during these months to control television – a "TV Blitzkrieg," Variety called it – went beyond overt criticism. They included also varied covert harassments of newsmen regarded as enemies. Daniel Schorr of CBS, after a dispatch that displeased the White House, found that the FBI was questioning friends and acquaintances about him. Most such operations did not become public knowledge until much later.*

* *Blitzkrieg: literally, "lightning war"; now used to refer to any sudden, devastating attack.*

Historically, direct contact between the White House and newspeople has not been a rare event, nor has it been confined to television news alone. The 1970s were a time of frequent and often dramatic clashes between administration officials and print journalists, as witnessed by the *New York Times* publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 (information, at the time, classified as top secret by the Defense Department) and, later, the *Washington Post*'s aggressive investigative reporting of the Watergate scandal. In these cases and others, government officials at various levels have applied pressure on the news media to cut the flow of information.

It should not be surprising, however, that politicians are particularly sensitive to the much larger power of television news, with its huge audiences and instantaneous impact. Again, Erik Barnouw in *Tube of Plenty:*

During 1965-66 press references to a "credibility gap" in the Johnson administration multiplied, and relations with newsmen became increasingly prickly. If he [Johnson] considered a question hostile, he could vent full fury or scorn on the questioner. Turning on one reporter, he said, "Why do you come and ask me, the leader of the Western world, a . . . [dumb] question like that?" Television newsmen became familiar with his consuming interest in what they broadcast about him. His three-set lineup of receivers seemed to keep him aware of every word. At CBS, Walter Cronkite, leaving the air after his nightly CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite, *often found his secretary holding the telephone aloft. "White House on the line." It might be a presidential aide, or it might be the President himself, demurring at a detail. White House correspondent Dan Rather got frequent angry phone calls at home, often laced with strong language. A protest often culminated in an inquiry about sources. "Where did you get that?"*

Cross-Ownership and the Fairness Doctrine

Most local television news organizations are influenced by the Fairness Doctrine to cover local news as thoroughly as possible and, within the limitations set by time and money, to explore all sides of the local issues aired on their newscasts. A large number of local stations around the country, however, are "cross-owned" with newspapers and magazines; that is, some TV stations are owned by corporations that also own newspapers and/or magazines. Some of these parent corporations are politically conservative while others are liberal; some are pro-labor while others are anti-labor; some tend to support the ideals of the Republican Party and others, the Democratic Party. And some of these corporations require the newspapers and magazines they own to reflect their political philosophies, both in selection of news and in editorials. Other parent corporations may allow their papers to present a broad range of news but require them to take a consistently liberal or conservative (or whatever) stand in editorials. A newspaper's bias, if it has one, normally reflects the bias of its owners – and when such owners also control broadcasting companies, or at least have a significant say in their operation, the Fairness Doctrine may be threatened at the local level.

Activity 3

Ownership and Bias

Find out about the ownership of your local TV stations. Discuss in class how the political philosophies of the owners affect the fullness and fairness of coverage of important public issues.

Eyewitness News

In 1968, San Francisco was hit with a newspaper strike. KQED, the local public television station, decided to bring in newspaper reporters to present the news, and then discuss it among themselves on television. This was the first example of what has come to be known as the "eyewitness news" format. In commercial television, eyewitness news began later that year at KYW in Philadelphia, when the news director discovered he could put news reporters on the air to present their own stories, without paying them additional salaries. (The union at that time did not draw a distinction between on-air and off-air reporting work for television.)

See Reading 5.3, "In Conversation with Ted O'Brien"

The eyewitness news approach was immediately successful. It featured two or even three co-anchorpersons alternating their own news reports with stories done on tape or live from location by a number of other correspondents (reporters). After a while, on many stations, that basic idea evolved into "happy talk" news, in which the reporters chat, comment, and joke with each other between news items. When it began to appear that audiences preferred this loose, casual style, other stations began to copy the "happy talk" approach in order to boost their ratings. Consultants, or "show doctors," were called in to overhaul news show sets, schedules, and even the performers themselves to make everything fit the new style. Informal chatting and kidding among news commentators made them seem like "just folks," even though much of their banter was scripted (written in advance) and read off a TelePrompter.*

* *TelePrompter: trade name for a machine that televises a picture of typed "copy." A performer who reads off the TelePrompter sees the words on a small monitor on the television camera.*

Because audience ratings surged for those stations with "happy talk" news, the local news hour became the most competitive time slot in local programming. And of course it has always been considered important for local newscasts to pull high ratings in order to create good audience flow into their network's newscasts and afterwards into the programs that follow. Fairly inexpensive to produce, local "happy talk" news shows became highly profitable, bringing increased advertising revenue both to local stations and networks as audiences expanded. For example, in 1979, ABC-TV added a new affiliate station in Minnesota largely because the affiliate's newscast was by far the most popular in the area, easily outdrawing the competition. Audience flow, network executives realized, would automatically boost ratings for the network's prime time shows, bringing in more money for both the network and the affiliate.

The "happy talk" format has been criticized, however, for placing too much emphasis on entertainment value to gather people "into the tent" of the ratings game. In his 1976 address to the Radio-Television News Directors Association, CBS's Walter Cronkite remarked:

"I echo Charlie Kuralt's* famous speech . . . last fall: it seems to me as I travel about the country that all it takes today to be an anchorperson is to be under twenty-five, fair of face and figure, dulcet of tone, and well-coiffed. And that is just for the men. That – and to be able to fit into the blazer with the patch on the pocket.

"This doesn't make a journalist, and I think the public may be more aware of that than the stations which cling to their belief, or the persuasion of an out-of-town consultant, that the anchorman, or woman's, personality – rather than his or her news ability – is the key factor in building an audience . . .

"There is no newsman worth his salt who does not know that advisers [consultants] dictate that no item should run more than forty-five seconds; that there must be a film story within the first thirty seconds of the newscast, and that it must have action in it (a barn burning, or a jack-knifed tractor trailer truck will do); that calls a ninety-second film piece a "mini-documentary"; that advises against covering city hall because it is dull; that says the anchorman or woman must do all voice-overs for "identity" – any real newsman or woman knows that sort of stuff is balderdash. It's cosmetic, pretty packaging – not substance."

* *Charles Kuralt is a CBS News correspondent.*

The Social Responsibility of News

Because television is now able to cover many news events live, the medium can become an unwitting participant in the story as it happens. Consider this incident, where a crime in the making took on added dimension because of the very presence of television:

It is 10:30 pm in Indianapolis. All of a sudden, the three local television stations break away from their network programming to show a crazy man named Anthony Kiritsis holding a sawed-off shotgun to the head of Richard Hall, a mortgage company president-turned hostage.

Kiritsis has been holding Hall for sixty-two hours, and now he is threatening to blow his head off if the media don't cover his demand live. "Get those g---- cameras on!" he keeps yelling at the cameramen. The three stations comply.

Satisfied that he is on live TV, Kiritsis starts a twenty-six minute harangue against the mortgage company in religious and sexual obscenities that probably have never before been heard over the airwaves. ABC affiliate WTHR pulls the plug on their coverage soon after their news director sees that he is losing control of what is going on his station's air. But the other two stations stick it out until the bitter end, risking the possibility that their audiences will witness a live murder.

The next day WTHR is showered with phone calls and mail complimenting their decision to bail out. The other two stations are flooded with angry objections to the live broadcasting of so much obscenity and potential bloodshed.

– Jordan Goodman
from "The Minicam Revolution"
TV Book: The Ultimate Television Book

The assailant, Anthony Kiritsis, was eventually captured, and no one was physically harmed. But it was conceivable at the time that the story could have turned out differently: the hostage could have been killed with hundreds of thousands of people watching.

Activity 4

ENG Reporting

The incident described above was covered for television by ENG cameras (Electronic News Gathering), small, lightweight cameras that are part of almost every local station's news equipment these days. Also known as Minicams or Electracams, they can broadcast events live from remote locations.

See Reading 5.4, "CBS News Guidelines: Coverage of Terrorists"

With your classmates, discuss the incident described above and decide whether the extensive coverage by the two stations that did not pull out was responsible, in terms of the possible consequences.

Television is the only medium that allows us to see events in distant places while they happen, as with the Kiritsis incident, above. In this way television can perform a unique service to the public. Although it may be incomplete and selective in its coverage, it is immediate, responsive, and attention-grabbing. At the network level especially it can act with astonishing power in bringing history into our homes as it is being made.

See Reading 5.5,
"President Kennedy Was Shot in Dallas, Texas, Today"

During the hours and days following President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963, for instance, the networks shelved all their regular scheduled programs to offer continuous live coverage of the aftermath in Dallas, Washington, and elsewhere. Just before the assassination, four out of ten homes had the television on. An hour later that number had doubled. All commercial interruptions were suspended. And on the following Sunday, with many millions watching, Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged assassin, was killed. It was the first live murder ever seen on television, and the only murder witnessed by so vast an audience.

For most Americans at the time, television was more than just a source of information. Many people felt that television served to unite the country during four days of bewilderment and despair.

In other times, network news organizations have covered a number of major news events live, showing that television can act with social responsibility. For almost 300 hours during the spring, summer, and fall of 1973, the three commercial networks rotated coverage of the Watergate hearings in the U.S. Senate, and incurred an estimated combined loss of $10 million in advertising revenues. Viewers were enthralled. Even though many daytime soap operas were pre-empted, audience mail was overwhelmingly in favor of continued coverage of the real-life drama in Washington. Public television stations carried the hearings live during the days and then on tape at night – and thankful viewers made contributions of more than $1.5 million in response to their fund-raising appeals. Television's coverage of the Watergate scandal concluded with President Nixon's resignation speech in August 1974, viewed, Nielsen estimates, by 110 million people. It was the largest audience ever for a Presidential speech, and the second largest television audience ever. (The most popular television event of all time? The first moon walk, July 1969.)

Television coverage of the Watergate hearings, June 1973. Grateful PBS viewers rewarded public television with contributions of more than $1.5 million.

Another of television's lasting images: President Nixon's resignation speech, August 1974.

The Image

Television news and information programs cover real events. But because news material, like everything else that is broadcast, must first be selected and then condensed and edited, the final product is often an incomplete or inaccurate portrait of what is actually happening.

In 1960, two Presidential candidates, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, squared off in a series of four televised debates which, it is generally agreed, served to sway previously uncommitted voters to Kennedy. Each debate averaged almost 70 million viewers, a huge television audience for that time.

See Reading 5.6, "In Conversation with Don Hewitt"

Director for the debates was CBS's Don Hewitt (since 1968 the producer of *60 Minutes*). Before the first debate, he asked Kennedy if he wanted makeup. Kennedy said no. He asked Nixon the same question. Although Nixon looked tired, pale, and thin (he, like Kennedy, was in the middle of a grueling campaign schedule but he had also been sick), he also refused. His advisers, however, applied a product called "Lazy-Shave" to his face to disguise his "five o'clock shadow" beard.

During the debate itself, Hewitt called for "reaction shots" from his cameras – shots showing one candidate listening to the other one speaking. As television historian Erik Barnouw recalls in his book *Tube of Plenty*:

Great Debate #3, in split-screen (Nixon in Los Angeles, Kennedy in New York). Nixon's appearance has improved, but the damage from the first debate has already been done.

Wide World Photos

> *. . . A glimpse of the listening Kennedy showed him attentive, alert, with a suggestion of a smile on his lips. A Nixon glimpse showed him haggard; the lines on his face seemed like gashes and gave [him] a fearful look. Toward the end, perspiration streaked the Lazy-Shave.*

Neither this debate nor the three that followed had much effect in shifting the support among members of the voting public who had already made up their minds. Nevertheless, polls indicated that the positive image Kennedy projected on the screen was what influenced so many uncommitted voters to support him instead of Nixon. On election day, when Kennedy barely squeezed past his opponent, many people thought that television had given him the edge. And yet, eight years later, Nixon became a master of the medium during another Presidential campaign.

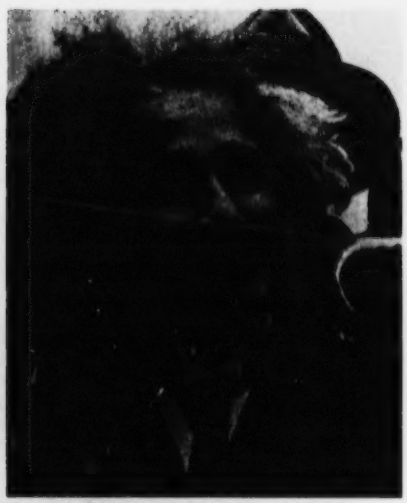
News is the unusual, the uncommon. News images are fragments of the unusual that often remain with us as lasting impressions. At major events involving a variety of activities – battles, conventions, demonstrations, riots – camera shots leap from one scene to another. Our minds

reassemble these pictures into a patchwork of images that make the most sense to us. The risk is that the series of images we remember may be inaccurate in terms of the entire news event; for every demonstrator who scuffles with police, hundreds protest peacefully – and yet the camera may concentrate primarily on the scufflers – the unusual, the uncommon. Or news editors may select a single unusual moment to show again and again – during opening and closing credits, for example. In the early days of the 1972 Presidential campaign, Maine Senator Edmund Muskie was the early leader, and a clear favorite to take the Democratic nomination. For a few brief seconds, television cameras captured him in an emotional moment as he wept during a speech in New Hampshire. Television selected this short and awkward scene, aired it repeatedly to large numbers of viewers, and created a lasting image for all those who saw it. Within a month, Muskie's political hopes were dashed.

Television's image-making power is well understood by those who use the medium frequently. It is, for example, used continually by national leaders, whether or not it's an election year. Full-time media consultants advise U.S Presidents and other highly visible political figures on how to improve their impact on the American public through mass communication, especially television. Press conferences, speeches, personal appearances, and trips to foreign places are carefully scheduled and staged to make the best use of television. It is unlikely that a Presidential candidate ever again will appear before 70 million viewers as casually as Richard Nixon did in the first debate of 1960 and risk looking "just like the bad guy in a Western."

The Documentary

Whereas television news creates images by selecting small pieces of events, the *documentary* is a program that presents much larger stories, with greater thoroughness and attention to detail. Because documentaries can be given more time for planning, production, and editing than the short pieces produced for daily newscasts, they present a much more carefully controlled flow of images. The documentary doesn't tell a true story, it *retells* it.



A stock footage scene from "Einstein," a presentation of public television's highly acclaimed documentary science series, NOVA.

Documentaries take many forms. On *60 Minutes*, twelve-to-seventeen-minute stories, through editing, build dramatically to a kind of climax. The well-known independent filmmaker Frederick Wiseman creates documentaries in a style known as *cinéma vérité* ("true cinema") in which over a long period of time the camera records every aspect of a given event and everything the people involved in it do, without selecting anything or anyone to emphasize. Selection comes later, during the editing process, when Wiseman throws away as much as a hundred feet of film for every foot he uses, and assembles shots and scenes to create the effect he wants. His films *High School* and *Titicut Follies* are famous documentaries. None of his works is narrated. The people on camera – those directly involved in whatever situation Wiseman is filming – are the only ones who speak.

An even more unusual documentary, *The Empire State Building*, was made in the 1960s by artist and filmmaker Andy Warhol. Using one camera that never moved, Warhol filmed the Empire State Building for an entire day from sunrise to sunset without interruption. An audience that sits through the entire documentary might be described as somewhat more than patient – for the film runs twelve hours!

Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*, in syndication on television during the 1970s, is a wildlife documentary. Late in the show's history, a narrated disclaimer was added during the closing credits: "The scenes presented here, whether actual or created, depict authenticated facts." This mouthful means that from time to time scenes that appear to be from real life have actually been staged to represent reality. Granted that it is often difficult, time-consuming, and even dangerous to film wild animals – but the disclaimer raises the question of how true a documentary a program is when some scenes are recreated, or "faked," for the camera.

See Reading 5.7, "Harvest of Shame" and **See Reading 5.8,** "Migrant"

Some television documentaries report on controversial issues, and so must fall under the guidelines of the Fairness Doctrine. The producer of a controversial documentary probably has an opinion on the issue: nuclear power plants are dangerous, for instance. But even so, the program must seek to show a balance of opinion and information in order to be fair. If arguments from both sides are presented, however, the program can still try to persuade its audience to the producer's point of view.

Even though documentaries are more thorough than newscasts, like all other TV programs they are bound by what former CBS News chief Friendly calls the "tyranny of the stopwatch" – television's time limitations. Documentaries are thoroughly edited. Real conversations are cut apart and then spliced together. Time sequences are often shattered and rearranged. The camera sees only so much, and much of what the camera sees ends up as discarded film footage anyway. When you watch any documentary program, try to imagine what has been edited out of the show, and pay careful attention to the cuts between camera shots. Try to judge how much the documentary's "reality" has been carefully selected and rearranged to create a specific effect on you – the audience.

. . . The documentarist, like any communicator in any medium, makes endless choices. He selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lenses, juxtapositions, sound, words. Each selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not . . .

. . . Unlike the fiction artist, he is dedicated to not inventing. It is in selecting and arranging his findings that he expresses himself; these choices are, in effect, comments. And whether he adopts the stance of observer, or chronicler, or whatever, he cannot escape his subjectivity. He presents his version of the world.

– Erik Barnouw
in *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*
Oxford University Press, 1974

When you're watching documentary programs, use what you've learned about production techniques – especially editing – before you accept the entire program as "fact."

Reading

5.1 In Conversation with Sandy Socolow

Sandy Socolow is the producer of the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite. In his opinion, what are the things a nightly newscast can and cannot do?

Making the CBS Evening News

What is the role of broadcast journalism in this society?

Without judging whether it's good or bad for society, broadcast journalism has become in recent years the dominant channel by which Americans receive information about their lives and times. That's the role it occupies. More people get all of their news from broadcast journalism than any other source – newspapers, magazines, what have you. And more people get all of their news from the evening newscast, in particular, than another source.

A half-hour is an awfully short time. I'm sure you've heard stories of typing up a script of an evening news show and putting it on the front page of the New York Times *and seeing that it's only a few columns' worth. Isn't that frustrating?*

Yes. Not only is it frustrating, to practitioners of the craft, but there's a serious danger of distortion by compression. I would refer you to a speech Walter Cronkite made several years ago on this theme of distortion by compression.* It was his complaint about the dangers of limiting yourself to the evening news as the sole source of your information.

Would an hour's worth of evening news work?

Sure. I don't see an hour network newscast happening in my professional lifetime, however. We had a real wave going for us about three years ago when we could have pulled it off, one network or another. If one network had gone the other two would have followed right in its place. But that wave has crested, I'm afraid. I think it's behind us, and I think the odds of an hour newscast are quite remote. Boy, I'd love to be proved wrong in that prophecy, but I don't see it coming.

What about the structure of the evening newscast? How do you choose a news story?

There's very little choice involved. It's so instinctive. I've been practicing my craft in one way or another for thirty years, and I would say it's a rare day when the lead isn't obvious. The only times we have problems with picking the lead story is when it's a very slow news day where the news flow slacks off and we have a bunch of marginal stories floating around. And the rarity is what happened last Friday night, on March second [1979], when all three network news shows had different leads. That's a once-in-every-six-months or so occasion.

There are criticisms that networks will go to places where it's easiest to go with their camera crews, or more often where they've got their camera crews and not much else.

The thesis that we cover stories where we have camera crews and neglect the rest of the world is a dumb, blind critique from somebody who doesn't watch much network news in our broadcasts. Admittedly, there are a lot of Washington newscasts, but that's a reflection of life in the United States today. There is perhaps too much Washington. I worry about that quite often myself. But we have exotic datelines almost every night that cost us considerable money! What about Jonestown? Nicaragua? Teheran? There is no permanent CBS News establishment in Teheran. There may be now, when things simmer down, but up to the point of the fall of the Shah, we didn't have any camera crews there.*

Sandy Socolow, producer of The CBS Evening News *with Walter Cronkite.*

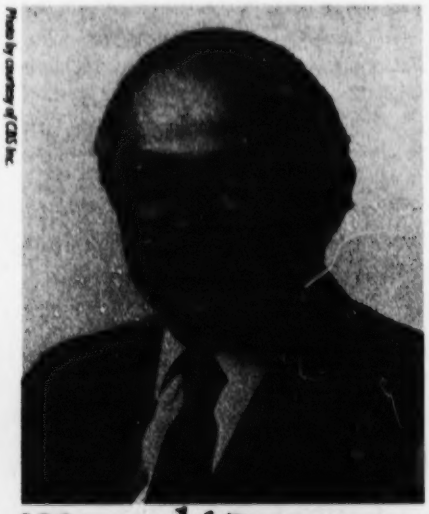


Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

Can it be a problem not having a regular correspondent stationed in one of those areas?

Oh, yes. That's a different kind of problem. When a television reporter hits the ground, the event has usually started. And immediately, compared to a newspaper or magazine writer, he has to become an expert. That is a tough assignment, and there's an area where some philosophical problems might be raised.

How do you deal with that?

Sometimes well, sometimes not so well. Covering news for television is a tremendously expensive proposition, and we are short-staffed. We're victims. There's nobody rich enough to cover the world on television the way it ought to be covered.

How do you determine what gets on the air, given the limitations of the half-hour format?

We do not make negative decisions. We make constantly positive decisions about what we're going to get on the show, what we *can* get on the show. We try to get as much as possible on the show in a cohesive, understandable way. Then, after we've made those decisions and packed our twenty-three-minute newscast, of course things are going to fall by the wayside, but they fall by the wayside in the absence of any positive decision, and not through a negative decision.

You don't try to control the flow of information?

We do, in effect, but we sure don't approach it that way, and we don't discuss it that way, and we don't think of it that way. The effect may be no different.

You've never had a situation in which somebody called up and said, "Don't

** The 1976 speech to the Radio-Television News Directors Association, excerpted in this unit.*

** This interview was held before the Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in Iran.*

run a story"?

We've had those don't-run-a-story calls, and we'll get many more; they're a dime a dozen from the White House, people like that.

But didn't you ever not run a story because of one of those calls?

They weren't specifics. I have a vague recollection of a request during the Vietnam War that we not run a particular story because it revealed some tactical detail that the army didn't want run, and I can't remember whether we did or didn't. Those kinds of requests should always be looked upon with great suspicion.

Why?

Because usually they're self-serving.

Richard Salant [former CBS News president, now Vice-Chairman of the Board at NBC] was recently asked to give his critique of network news. He said in some ways you provide little more than a headline service.

I think it's very important that high school students be inoculated with the belief that we are a headline service and nothing more, and that we shouldn't be depended upon for the whole story. We should be a starting point from which they go to other places to get perspective, to get background, to get history on a given situation in which they might be interested. We can take them to the scene with great drama and immediacy in ways nobody else can. Those are our strengths. Beyond that, I would urge them to read newspapers and read magazines until they're bored to death.

What is the news?

The news is a deviation from the normal. The news is the day the mail was not delivered. We did not report to you that the mail was delivered today.

There are a lot of people who seem to want to hear "happy talk."

No, they don't. People say that, but you can't go around asking people what they want to hear on a newscast. First of all, they don't have any frame of reference in which to answer that question. Second of all, they will say, I suppose, that they want good news. But they don't really want good news. What they're really interested in is why the Begin-Carter peace talks are going badly. And that's why they're tuning in to Cronkite – and it's bad news, basically. Sure they'd be happy to hear that peace has been signed and settled, but that's not the kind of good news people are talking about when they say they want good news. There have been several attempts over the years to do "good news" newspapers, "good news" radio broadcasts, "good news" television broadcasts, restricting themselves to good news. They've all been abject failures, because there's nothing more boring. People tune out because usually the good news is not very important or significant, unfortunately. On the other hand, I submit to you that there's a lot of good news broadcast on the *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite*, for which we do not get credit because it's usually not as emphatic as the bad news. It's not as colorful. It's not as bloody. Charles Kuralt is a creature of the *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite*. His pieces are singing, lyrical pieces. Our criticisms are always about how bloody and awful the news was during the Vietnam War. Another thing that used to drive me crazy – I was a producer on the show then – I can't tell you how many interminable, boring, usually phony (in my hindsight judgment) stories we did on the *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* on land reform, on great outpourings of help to refugees, retraining farmers so they could have other ways to make a living.

Sounds like propaganda.

Right. In hindsight it was largely propaganda. There was no reality to it. But we put all of these things on the screen, and then we'd put ten seconds of a firefight on the screen, or ten seconds of a mound of dead GIs, and you'd wipe out the total memory of the audience of land reform, on which we may have spent four or five minutes.

Just briefly – how does the day go before broadcast time?

My flip answer to that, which I've delivered about half a dozen times, is that I do nothing. Other people around here do everything and I just kind of stand around, watch, and supervise. Right now, the broadcast producer is having a meeting with the foreign editor, which I would usually sit in on. Following that and some phone calls, he publishes a piece of paper which is called our outline. This gives everybody (because we have such a large staff – group journalism carried to its ultimate) a rundown of everything that we might want on the night's show. So with a minimum of talk and a minimum of wasted time, everybody starts with a common base about what the show will most likely look like. At noontime or thereabouts, we have a conference call with all the

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April 29, 1975: the last days of American evacuation from Saigon – and the end of a controversial era in television news coverage.

Wide World Photos

domestic bureau chiefs and the national editor, in which we go over all the stories we've outlined and what's changed since the morning meetings. At about three-thirty the broadcast producer, Cronkite, and I will usually sit down and work out a lineup for that evening's show. The lineup rarely reflects the show we do at six-thirty. Almost daily we change it between three-thirty and six-thirty for any number of reasons, most often editorial. We go on the air at six-thirty, win or lose. We do a show from six-thirty to seven. If we have a clean show editorially and technically, at seven the network pipes out a tape of the six-thirty show. If there are editorial reasons to update the seven o'clock show, we do parts of it live. If there's a technical goof, we correct the technical goof. And each individual station has a free choice. We have little or no sway over the stations as to which version they broadcast – the six-thirty or seven.

So in some markets we'll see it live at six-thirty.

That's right. Mostly you'll see it live at six-thirty. The ratio, I think, last time I looked, was about ten to one for the six-thirty version. In the Rocky Mountain states, in some places you'll see it at four-thirty in the afternoon. After the show is over at seven-thirty, as we are departing here, we have a "tomorrow producer," if you will (that's not a formal title), who is out of it as far as today's broadcast goes but who is worried about tomorrow, next week, next month, and six months from now. As we leave, he is handing the broadcast producer and me a piece of paper which tells us what it looks like for tomorrow morning.

How has technology affected the up-to-dateness of TV?

Over the span of the last twenty years, it's been dramatic. When I started in this business, it was the rare foreign news story that got on the air the day it happened. That was a rarity. That was gangbusters; that made you jump up and clap your hands for joy! When Queen Elizabeth was crowned, the networks went bananas and chartered jet fighters – military planes to fly stuff to Canada to transmit the stuff, get it on the air the same day. It was a network race to get an airplane. Now you just make a telephone call and you get a satellite with video and audio, and there you are, in Teheran.

So you no longer have to get a film story in the can and send it back to New York for processing before it's aired?

That's right. You see, what's happened is that a lot of timeless stories wind up getting on the air the day they are fabricated. Stories that could break for a day or two. They get on the air that day because it's so easy with the satellites. We've kind of put a brake on that because it's been a waste. But it used to be kind of automatic. You finish the story, and if there was a satellite, the correspondent just shoved it on the satellite.

One last question. Some opinion polls say that Walter Cronkite is the most trusted man in America. What does this mean for the Evening News*?*

Did you see *People* magazine last week? Their anniversary issue? They did a very expensive, extensive survey of their readers about personalities, and, in answer to the question, "*If there's bad news about the United States, or about Americans, who would you rather hear that bad news from?*" it was Walter Cronkite overwhelmingly. Nobody came close to him in terms of the guy to hear bad news from. Our experience is that whenever there's a crisis of some sort, a national crisis, the ratings on all the network news shows go up and people start tuning in. But we get more of the tune-ins because I do think people do come to Cronkite.

Are you grooming somebody to take Cronkite's place?

Well, I wish it were as rational as that. CBS News is not an organization that has career paths or any kind of cohesive training program. I don't thing anybody's being groomed. We happen to be blessed with an all-star cast of potential replacements: Charles Kuralt, Roger Mudd, Dan Rather, Bob Schieffer on the *Morning News* – any one of them could do the job. Although I wouldn't envy the guy who's chosen, because the worst assignment anybody in broadcast journalism could have is to follow Walter Cronkite as the sole anchorman for *CBS Evening News.**

* *In February 1980, CBS announced that Dan Rather would succeed Cronkite in 1981 as anchor of the* CBS Evening News.

5.2 *Whether or not to broadcast a live news event, like an unscheduled Presidential talk, can sometimes be a difficult decision for a news chief, as it was for Fred Friendly when he was president of CBS News in the mid-1960s. What decision did he make? What did he have to consider when making this decision?*

Split-Second Decision

by Fred Friendly
from Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control . . .
Random House, 1967

That night, on U.S. Highway 80 between Montgomery and Selma, a white civil rights worker from Detroit, Mrs. Viola Liuzzo, was killed while driving freedom marchers home.

The next day, March 26, our "unscheduled news" programming called for live coverage from the White House while President Johnson pinned medals on Gemini III astronauts Virgil Grissom and John Young. The ceremony began shortly after 11 am with the President among the speakers, and ended up predictably with NASA officials using the air time for a long public relations speech. Harry Reasoner stayed with the action until noon, describing the handshaking, child-hugging, and other festivities. NBC had elected in advance to stay on the air after the White House ceremonies in order to cover the parade to Capitol Hill, where the astronauts were to attend a congressional luncheon. Watching this on the bank of monitors in my office, my colleagues and I rejoiced that we had decided against televising the motorcade, for it was a rainy, windy day and there were no crowds. For once we had guessed right, and NBC was trapped.

Suddenly there was a call on my direct line to the Washington office. It was Bill Small, our bureau chief, who said that word had come from the White House suggesting that we keep our cameras ready; the President might come on the air again in a few minutes. In the instant it took me to ask Small the question I knew he probably couldn't answer – "What's the President going to talk about?" – I was aware of our plight. We were back with our soap operas, while NBC, now stuck with that damp procession, would welcome a chance to switch to the East Room even if it were only to televise Mrs. Johnson welcoming a garden club.

Fully aware of the passion with which millions of women follow the slow-motion plots of midday serials, I called the television network people to ask what problems it would cause if we interrupted scheduled programming at 12:30. The answer was: "It would cost thirty thousand bucks, and you've interrupted *Search for Tomorrow* half a dozen times lately." Besides, they asked, what was the President going to say that was so important that it couldn't be delayed until regular news? I said that I would try to find out. I called Stanton to ask his advice, but he was in a meeting.

At 12:25 Small called again to ask whether we were going to cover the President's appearance or not. "Bill," I asked, "can't you find out what he's going to talk about?"

"George Reedy [the Presidential News Secretary] says it's important, but he won't tell us anything. Why don't you call him?"

In thirty seconds I had Reedy on the tie line. "George, just for my ears, is the President going to talk about the Liuzzo killing?"

Reedy answered, "I won't say yes and I won't say no." He was trying to avoid a leak.

I was on the spot. If we went to the East Room and the President then chose to talk about plans for postal reform or to discuss the appointment of a new ambassador, I would be the goat with the television network and with all those soap-opera fans. If I decided against coverage – on my monitor NBC was already announcing the momentary appearance of the President – and his subject turned out to be newsworthy, we would read about the absence of CBS in the newspapers from coast to coast the next day – and would deserve the scolding.

At moments such as this my office became the equivalent of the "slot"* of a city news room. At 12:35, the bank of monitors on my wall reflects the various options before me. NBC is still televising its rained-out parade but is continually switching back to the East Room. ABC has entertainment; on the CBS screen is *Search for Tomorrow*. On one of the closed-circuit monitors I watch the White House correspondents filing back into the East Room and the cameras being uncapped. Small calls to say that the President is due in two minutes. My office is filled with editors and correspondents urging me to switch to the President. The phone on my desk rings. It is the sales department: "Can we assume you are not going to interrupt? Remember, it's thirty thousand bucks."

"No, you can't assume anything," I say. Suddenly the Presidential seal fills the screen of the monitor, the signal to the networks that the President will appear in thirty seconds. The phones on my desk continue to ring. On the tie line Small calmly says, "Well?" I take a deep breath, look up at the monitors blinking back at me and breathe, "Go!"

In less than five seconds Reasoner's calm voice is interrupting the network, and millions of television sets respond to our signal. The phones from CBS headquarters are jangling but there is no time to pick them up. Suddenly the seal is gone, but the President has not yet entered the room. In the interval Reasoner discusses the earlier events of the day, and speculates about the Liuzzo killing. Then one can sense from the hush spreading across the room and the turning of heads toward the door that Mr. Johnson is approaching. At last he enters with two familiar figures: FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach. We've guessed right. It must be the Liuzzo case and there must be news of an arrest, or Mr. Hoover would not be there.*

Civil rights march on Washington, in 1964.

© American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.

* *slot: Center of U-shaped desk where newspaper news editor sits – a busy, hectic place.*

* *It was indeed the Liuzzo case.*

5.3 In Conversation with Ted O'Brien

Ted O'Brien, newscaster for WNAC-TV in Boston, was asked in an interview to talk about local television news. What does he mean when he says that some local stations promote their newscasts for the "sizzle, not the steak"? According to O'Brien, what function does the newscaster perform in service to the community?

Local News: "We Live and Die by the Ratings"

The local newscaster has a twofold responsibility: first, to report events that affect people in the community, whether it's the string plucked in Washington that vibrates on the block, or the activities of local officials, organizations and businesses; and second, to act as a watchdog of the public interest. That's the kind of mandate I've operated under for fifteen years as a television reporter. As an anchorman, I strive for objectivity. Reporting and anchoring are different. I feel I have greater impact as a reporter. As a reporter, you can allow yourself to be more active. The expression of personality in the anchor role, on the other hand, detracts from the material. As an anchorman, I'm not saying *I* am important, but *this* is important.

Television journalism itself is only about thirty years old and still in the process, I think, of trying to find itself. Initially, television newscasters were transplants from radio. Their approach was severe and formal, and completely material-oriented. In the mid-1960s, when so much of the news was grim, there was a tendency to present newscasts in a lighter vein. The pendulum has continued to swing so that now appearance or personality plays an increasing role in the selection of newscasters. But the real professionals in this business work to a personal standard, apart from what may or may not be the fashion of the moment, or their station's current position in the market. The real professionals approach each piece of work with the intention of making it the best one they've ever done, letting the chips fall where they may. I think that's the only way you can maintain your integrity. Television will forgive just about everything, but it won't forgive someone pretending to be something that he or she is not. The viewer picks that up. It's subtle, and it may take some time, but eventually people will catch on to the deception and turn away. If you are yourself, you will find an audience. If it's not the audience your stations wants, your job's in trouble, but you have maintained your personal standard.

The name of the television game is ratings; you may be a good newsman who's always accurate, but you can lose your job if you're not attracting a mass audience. What is a mass audience? If somebody else has five hundred thousand viewers and you have two hundred and fifty thousand, that's still two hundred and fifty thousand viewers, but that's not the way the game is played. The game is played according to who has the numbers. The station with the highest ratings can demand the greatest amount of revenue from advertisers. So stations will attempt to change in the hope of gaining that rating. You go about becoming number one by promoting yourself, by telling people about yourself over and over again. People tend to stick with one station. They'll never know you're the best one in town unless they tune in. If your competitor's position in the market has been so strong that people don't think of news except in terms of that station, then you have a tough row to hoe.

When I started in 1963, the attitude was that news is a public service. Although you were supposed to do a good solid job, if you didn't pull in a large audience, that was okay. When they discovered that there was a profit to be made in selling that local time, and a *big* profit, then they began putting more into it. And that led to some of the abuses I've described, that is, the "sizzle rather than the steak." It means the involvement of the advertising side, the people who were concerned with the ratings because local news time became the big money-maker for the station. Circulation in a newspaper is a kind of "given." You don't hear a newspaper salesperson telling the city editor, "Gee, you've got to get more spice in your coverage." First of all, the city editor would probably punch him out. At the same time, this also meant a tremendous upgrading of the whole news department and its relative place in the scheme of things.

So now we live or die by the ratings. Because of ratings, multimillion-dollar productions are dumped and news announcers are fired, hired, and moved around. Ratings are a fact of life, and you learn to accept that. This says something about the news as show business. The argument is that you have to have an audience in order to be effective. When ratings are low, the decision-makers instantly want to change the audience. That's not realistic, but you will see anchorman after anchorman going through a station, in the hopes that one of them will catch on.

The station's promotion of their news personalities is an attempt to cause viewers to identify with the announcer as a person so that they develop the habit of watching their friend. The presence of that newscaster on a regular basis builds a kind of symbiotic relationship. My father was a radio sportscaster and then a television weatherman and late-movie host. I grew up knowing that people identified very strongly with him. He came to be a friend. He became that one person whom people returned to night after night for a feeling of human contact, regardless of what the movie was. There are a lot of isolated people in our society who actually feel as if they know that person. I don't believe you can separate the material from the personal relationship between the announcer and the viewer.

To effect that kind of rapport with my own viewers, I try to be as knowledgeable as I can before I arrive on the scene of a story. I draw on my general knowledge of politics, economics, and government in examining its various elements. I do a lot of reading to keep up to date and also maintain contacts in the community with people whose views and opinions may be valuable in illuminating some aspect of the material I am reporting. I put that all together and look for an insight into the story so that the viewers who are coming in cold will understand what they're seeing.

I think it's possible to do that effectively in the two and a half to three minutes that a story runs. It depends on the elements, the construction and the writing. It takes writing that stings the ear because people hear it once. They can't go back and reread it as they could in a newspaper. And it takes a composition of elements which will create impact

so that viewers get interested in the kind of knowledge I want them to have.

I also try to let the material dictate how I'm going to put the story together. For example, some months ago I got a call about a small nonprofit center for inner city kids that had not been paid in the four or five months since it was funded. They had no heat, and it was a chilly part of the year. So we taped the interview with our coats on. That said more than any arrangement of words possibly could about a serious problem which needed attention. In offering the other side of the story, we went to see the officials involved and said, "This is what our viewers are going to be seeing tonight, and we would be extremely happy to report tomorrow that the red tape has been cut. We are offering you an opportunity to take care of this situation." As it happened, the problem was cleared up within twenty-four hours. It sometimes happens, though, that when a group embarrasses public officials, whether or not it's their own fault, they tend to lean on the group. They figure that we're going to be there once and then go away. So I go back a few months later to see how things are going. If the group is still having problems, then we get serious. That's an example of the watchdog of the public interest. I find myself drawn to people who, for one reason or another, find themselves outside the mainstream of society. When I can accomplish something in that area, I get a great deal of satisfaction, because there are certainly plenty of spokesmen for interests that have power.

Ted O'Brien

5.4 *When television covers an event live, its presence can have an effect on the activities it is covering. Former CBS News President Richard S. Salant recognized this risk a short time ago when world-wide acts of terrorism were on the increase, and he prepared the list of guidelines below.*

CBS News Guidelines: Coverage of Terrorists

by Richard S. Salant
from *TV Book: The Ultimate Television Book*
Workman, 1977

The following CBS News guidelines governing the CBS News reporting of events involving terrorist/hostage stories were issued on April 14, 1977, in the light of the increasing incidence of terrorist activities. The guidelines were issued by CBS News in the basic conviction that terrorist activities are newsworthy events which news organizations must be free to report, but that at the same time such events impose special obligations upon news organizations in order to minimize, as far as possible, the dangers of contagion, the dangers of oversensationalism, and, above all, the dangers to the innocent hostages.

Because terrorist/hostage events in the United States are of rather recent origin, the guidelines are new in that they deal specifically with such incidents. But generally they are simply applications of longstanding CBS News policies concerning inflammatory or dangerous events such as riots or demonstrations.

Richard S. Salant

Coverage of Terrorists

Because the facts and circumstances of each case vary, there can be no specific self-executing rules for the handling of terrorist/hostage stories. CBS News will continue to apply the normal tests of news judgment and if, as so often they are, these stories are newsworthy, we must continue to give them coverage despite the dangers of "contagion." The disadvantages of suppression are, among other things, (1) adversely affecting our credibility ("What else are the news people keeping from us?"); (2) giving free rein to sensationalized and erroneous word-of-mouth rumors; and (3) distorting our news judgments for some extraneous judgmental purpose. These disadvantages compel us to continue to provide coverage.

Nevertheless, in providing for such coverage there must be thoughtful, conscientious care and restraint. Obviously, the story should not be sensationalized beyond the actual fact of its being sensational. We should exercise particular care in how we treat the terrorist/kidnapper. More specifically:

1. An essential component of the story is the demands of the terrorist/kidnapper and we must report these demands. But we should avoid providing an excessive platform for the terrorist/kidnapper. Thus, unless such demands are succinctly stated and free of rhetoric and propaganda, it may be better to paraphrase the demands instead of presenting them directly through the voice or picture of the terrorist/kidnapper.

2. Except in the most compelling circumstances, and then only with the approval of the president of CBS News, or in his absence, the senior vice-president of News, there should be no live coverage of the terrorist/kidnapper since we may fall into the trap of providing an unedited platform for him. (This does not limit live on-the-spot reporting by CBS News reporters, but care should be exercised to assure restraint and context.)

3. News personnel should be mindful of the probable need by the authorities who are dealing with the terrorist for communication by telephone and hence should endeavor to ascertain, wherever feasible, whether our own use of such lines would be likely to interfere with the authorities' communications.

4. Responsible CBS News representatives should endeavor to contact experts dealing with the hostage situation to determine whether they have any guidance on such questions as phraseology to be avoided, what kinds of questions or reports might tend to exacerbate the situation, etc. Any such recommendations by established authorities on the scene should be carefully considered as guidance (but not as instruction) by CBS News personnel.

5. Local authorities should also be given the name or names of CBS personnel whom they can contact should they have further guidance or wish to deal with such delicate questions as a news-

man's call to the terrorists or other matters which might interfere with the authorities dealing with the terrorists.

6. Guidelines affecting our coverage of civil disturbances are also applicable here, especially those which relate to avoiding the use of inflammatory catchwords or phrases, the reporting of rumors, etc. As in the case of policy dealing with civil disturbances, in dealing with a hostage story reporters should obey all police instructions but report immediately to their superiors any such instructions that seem to be intended to manage or suppress the news.

7. Coverage of this kind of story should be in such over-all balance as to length, that it does not unduly crowd out other important news of the day.

5.5 *Fifteen years after these shocking words were spoken, a newsman recalls how television held the nation together in its day of grief.*

"President Kennedy Was Shot in Dallas, Texas, Today"

by David Brinkley
from *TV Guide*
November 18, 1978

On that Friday afternoon, fifteen years ago this week, Chet Huntley was in his office in New York and I in mine in Washington, about to start planning and writing that night's *Huntley-Brinkley Report*, and in the meantime poking through the day's news, thinking about what we would put on the air that night.

The news wasn't much. There was some NATO business in Europe, with Charles de Gaulle refusing to take part. Other countries had just been invited to join a satellite corporation. President Kennedy, at his last press conference, had been asked about the Washington ethical climate; he had said he thought it compared favorably with that in other places, and there was some discussion of that. And on this day, the President was in Texas doing a little politicking with Vice-President Johnson and Governor Connally. Nothing vastly exciting.

In the early afternoon, as NBC News people were coming back from lunch and looking over the day's news, we were tentatively thinking we would start the program that night with the Kennedy trip to Texas, not so much because it was big news as because there wasn't much else.

It was a quiet Friday and we were all looking forward to two days off and I was looking forward to two days with friends in a pretty little country town in Virginia.

In Dallas, the NBC correspondent riding just behind the President's car in a motorcade through the streets was Robert MacNeil. Shots were fired and the President was hit in the head. MacNeil jumped from the still-moving car on a run to the only nearby public telephone. So did the reporters from the networks, wire services, newspapers. MacNeil, younger and faster, got the first hand on the phone, called the NBC News desk in New York, screamed, "This is MacNeil in Dallas!" Before he could say the next horrible words, whoever had answered said, "Just a minute," laid down the phone, and *never came back*. MacNeil was left hanging there with the biggest news in years and nobody to give it to.

In minutes, the news began arriving from other sources and the news staff was so busy nobody remembered MacNeil on the phone.

William R. McAndrew, then president of News, was enraged and tried for weeks to find out who had answered the phone and left it. He intended to fire him. We never found out who it was. He may still be working here, keeping his secret.

The first voice, a staff announcer so upset that his voice trembled, came on NBC's New York station at 1:45:03 pm (ET) and said, "President Kennedy was shot in Dallas, Texas, today. Blood was seen on the President's head as they rushed him to a hospital. Mrs. Kennedy was heard to exclaim, 'Oh, no.' "

It took another minute and forty-two seconds to get the network switched together at an hour of day when normally it is not very active and the affiliate stations are carrying local programs. At 1:46:45 pm, the same announcer came on the network, still quivering, giving a few additional facts and ending with the words, "There is no information at present on his condition."

But the information soon came. The country was the victim of a great, historic crime, upset by its suddenness and finality, stunned and fearful, wondering why, what it meant and whether our national stability was in danger. It was the ultimate crime in a country already fearful of its own growing criminality, already double-locking its doors and hesitating to use the streets at night, seeing its young, thousand-day President shot dead in the street without purpose and without sense.

Those of age will remember that television's coverage ran without interruption through the days and nights from 1:53 on Friday afternoon until 1:16 am on the following Tuesday morning. There was nothing else on the network for seventy hours and twenty-seven minutes. No entertainment, no commercials.

I thought then, as Huntley and I and all of us on all the networks stayed with it to the last, day and night, that we helped the American people get through a sad and scary time by showing and telling everything there was, by preventing the spread of the frightening rumors always set afloat in times of public stress, by showing the swearing-in of the new President and showing the people that even in a time so horrible, orderly government continued, and by giving the new President Johnson the means to speak reassuring words to a people who desperately needed them. I thought, and think, it was the most useful single service in television's history.

"No entertainment, no commercials." CBS's Walter Cronkite, like his NBC counterpart David Brinkley, stayed with viewers throughout the long weekend of November 22-25, 1963.

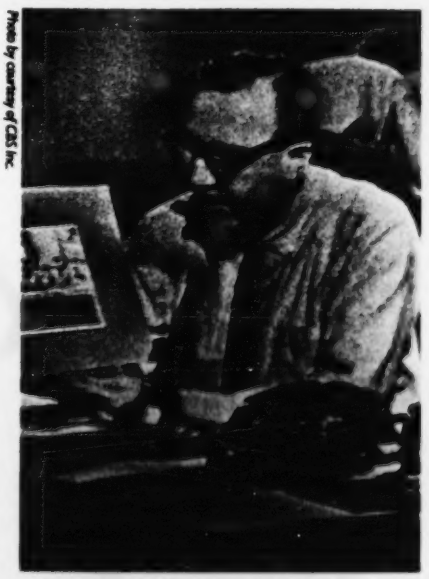


Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

Would we do it any differently today? Not much, I think. Our journalistic judgment then was that the time called for calm and unexcited exposition of all the events and facts available to us, delivered without histrionics or emotional outbursts. Because some of the same doubts and fears that occupied the public also occupied us in the first hours and days – Was this some kind of plot? Were there designs on other political leaders? Was there some force or entity, foreign or domestic, involved in this? If so, who and why? Not all these answers were available in those first hours and days, but the questions were there. And it seemed essential to us that the public be told everything we know and shown everything there was to see.

That was what we did, all of us on all the networks, and while it was impossible to make sense of the senseless, I did think we helped persuade a doubting, skeptical, fearful people that they were being told everything we knew at the time. In the same circumstances today, I would see no reason to do it any other way.

Technically, of course, we could do it better now. It would all be in color. There would be no delays for film processing and editing, since we now use magnetic tape. The cameras are light and easier to set up.

But I doubt all this would be much improvement. The higher speed is tremendously helpful in day-to-day news programs with rigid deadlines. A foreign report we used to fly across the Atlantic for use on Tuesday night we will now have by satellite on Monday night, and may even have it live if the time is right. Again, all this helps on programs tightly scheduled, our normal way of life. But on a continuous, live program like the Kennedy death and funeral, speed was not so much of a factor. It was nearly all live, and since live TV is simultaneous with the event itself it cannot be any faster.

Television, or television news, at any rate, certainly is at its best and most competent when it does live coverage of events – from the Kennedy tragedy to the moon landing, political conventions, Presidential press conferences, impeachment hearings, the Bicentennial Day, the Olympics. For all of us, it is our favorite work to do, even though it is the longest, hardest and most tiring. Because it is the ultimate realization of the whole basis of even the word itself – television, whose Greek and Latin roots mean "distant sight." The sight, from a distance, of reality otherwise inaccessible.

Perhaps live coverage is not used as often as it might be, but then it is true that not many foreseeable events are of enough interest to enough people to justify live coverage. But when there is one, television can do it as nothing else can.

On the weekend of President Kennedy's death and funeral, all the American people saw, after the first stunning shock, that our national structure went on, that the solemn duties were carried out with the greatest efficiency and care and good taste, right down to the triangular folding of the American flag.

It was a shared experience unlike any other because we could all see it and hear it. People grieving in private saw others grieving in public. It was our first genuinely national funeral, a death in our national family attended by every one of us.

As the years have passed and much else has happened, good and bad, and as we look back on the incredible sight on live television of a man climbing down to the surface of the moon, it is interesting to recall that the last speech Kennedy would have delivered, written for that night in Dallas, included a promise to press on with exploring space and landing on the moon.

In the last speech he actually delivered, in Fort Worth the morning before he died, he said, "We would like to live as we once lived, but history will not permit it. . . . We are still the keystone in the arch of freedom. And I think we will continue to do as we have done in the past – our duty."

Those were his last public words before a weekend none of us can ever forget and none of us will ever fully understand, a weekend when Chet and I and all of us were sorry for our country and proud of television for helping our countrymen to share their grief, respond together to sights of tragedy and tragic beauty, and then go on.

The second preceding the killing of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby. Millions watched this murder on live television.

Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

5.6 In Conversation with Don Hewitt

60 Minutes producer Don Hewitt explains how the show works, and why it is successful. "It's not pure documentary," he says, "it's show business and four star commentators."

"... To Shine Lights in Dark Corners"

60 Minutes is often mentioned as an example of good programming. Why does it work, and what makes it a success?

What makes *60 Minutes* a success is the faith that the audience has in the four reporters. It is no coincidence that the four most popular reporters on television are also the four hardest-working reporters in television. Mike Wallace, Morley Safer, Dan Rather, and Harry Reasoner log more air miles a year than anybody else in the business. They spend more time away from home, and when they are in New York, they spend more of their time in cutting rooms, editing with their producer and their film editor, than anybody else I know in this business. And that's reflected on the air because the audience has come to identify with and trust them. There are shows on television about cops, there are shows about soldiers, there are shows about detectives, there are shows about doctors, there are shows about cowboys. *60 Minutes* is a show about four reporters, and the four reporters are more fascinating to that audience *being themselves* than Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman *playing* Woodward and Bernstein. The stories that the *60 Minutes* producers find for real are more fascinating to the audience than the ones Lou Grant finds for make-believe, and he finds some pretty good ones.

I'll tell you some other things about *60 Minutes* that make it work. I happen to believe that audio is as important as video. I think it's your ear that keeps you tuned to the set as well as your eye. I've seen that when I've watched programs where they've lost the audio and people go to another channel. They lose video and the audience stays – the audio's there. I'm a bug on content and audio and delivery. When Mike, Morley, Dan, and Harry record in the studio on Friday, I turn my back on the screen and listen – I don't watch – and I will whirl around and say, "Mike, that pause is too long! That inflection is not right. That sentence doesn't belong there." I listen to the way words hit my ear, because I know when you marry that with the pictures later, it'll work.

I don't want to be distracted by pictures. I want to listen. Marginal audio, I'll throw out of the piece – I don't care what a guy says – if you have to strain to hear it, forget it, the audience is gone. Now, a lot of high school kids are interested in what they call the art of "filmmaking." "Filmmaking," incidentally, is a word I hate. "Filmmakers" is one of those 1967 words – I don't know what it means. They come in with a film they've made. They got a videotape camera for Christmas, which is a tool, and right away they're documentarians. I say, "Because you own that camera, you're no more a documentarian than if your mother bought you a typewriter. You're not a writer because your mother bought you a typewriter." The film's a little grainy. It's out of focus. It's a little confused. They tell you that's part of the art form. The pans are jerky and that's part of the art form. I say, "That's great. Take it to an audience, a theater where you pay four bucks. Your audience has one place to look and there are two big speakers booming the sound at you, right?"

Now you put the same thing on television. The dog's barking, the phone's ringing, there is a mother in the kitchen saying "Dinner's ready." The neighbors are at the back door. Our competition is the distractions of the household, and I'm always conscious of that. When I sit in that screening room, I become a viewer, and I say to myself, "If I were home, would I watch this?" No, I would try to find out what the score is on the tennis match, because my mind would have wandered.

You sit with your confreres in a screening room and you say, "Hey, listen to this! This is sensational, it's coming off right now." There's nobody at home doing that. And at that moment, when you've said, "Hey, that's sensational," that's just the moment when the phone rang and they missed it. Okay? So broadcasting on television is very different from having the captive audience in a theater or a moviehouse. There are any number of other channels to go to and you're always dealing with the attention span of that person staying with you. That to me is the name of this game, holding attention from beginning to end. I think a lot of documentaries get repetitive, because they're trying to fit a subject into a box that's called an hour. It doesn't fit into that box. I deal mostly with attention span, and I think that is one of the reasons we have such a large audience of subteenagers, who have a naturally short one, but who sit there fascinated by what they learn on *60 Minutes* because we cut away the chaff. We go for the wheat. We take all the extraneous stuff out. We try to establish a straight line from beginning to end without making all kinds of detours. And if you put a line in that's slightly confusing, what happens is, when the next line comes up, they're still wondering, "What did he mean by what he just said?" And if they begin to think about the line ten seconds ago, they're not hearing a line now.

On the other hand, you do have to compress time. What about the problem of television time versus real time? When you compress time, is there a problem with your audience's understanding how events really happened?

Not if you don't compromise your integrity. Now, I think my producers and these four guys are masters at telling stories in that twelve-to-seventeen-minute time period without glossing over or distorting reality. We're very conscious of it. I will listen to an interview, and a guy will say something rather startling, and I'll say, "Hold it. Let me see

One of television's most familiar emblems: the ticking stopwatch of 60 Minutes.

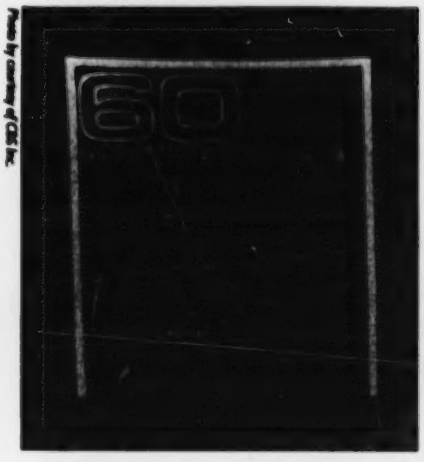


Photo by courtesy of CBS, Inc.

the transcript. What did he say after that? Did he soften it? Yes, well, you can't leave him there because that's not honest. That is not what he was going to say. You are taking advantage of that man because he misspoke himself or he overstated and then he brought it back to reality and back to earth and you are not giving him a chance to do that." Everything must be what it purports to be. Then you are not giving children a distorted view of the world in which they live. But if you get overly dramatic, if you cut pieces for drama instead of for the real intent of what the person was trying to say, then you are distorting reality and that is inexcusable.

Who is your audience?

We have the perfect demographics. We have a very big amount on college campuses, among high school kids, as well as among older and middle-aged people. It does not displease me that *60 Minutes* is watched by Punch Sulzberger, Kay Graham, Buffy Chandler, Henry Grunwald of *Time*, Ben Bradlee. But I don't broadcast for them. I broadcast for "the people," the folks. I broadcast for Lions and Rotarians and school kids and hard hats and firemen and schoolteachers and homemakers. And each week we try to strike a responsive chord in those people so they know a little more about the world in which they live. There are two kinds of news on television: the news of the last twenty-four hours – we are not very much concerned with that – and what *60 Minutes* does. We're concerned with the news of the times in which we live. What we do best, I think, is to shine lights in dark corners. If people are doing things in dark corners they shouldn't be doing, all we've done is turn the light on. Did you ever see the movie *Network*? Remember the guy who threw open the window and yelled, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" People don't do that. They ask *60 Minutes* to do it.

Did it start out that way?

It evolved into that.

How?

I'll tell you how it evolved, how this broadcast got on the air. For seventeen years I produced *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite*. After that I did documentaries. I was bored silly. One day I looked at all the ratings and it dawned on me that the same twelve to eighteen percent share of the audience was watching documentaries, whether they were on CBS, PBS, ABC, or NBC. They weren't reaching anybody. I wanted to reach the guy or the woman who turned off his or her set after *I Love Lucy*. And I said, "The way to do that is to go multisubject in an hour, to deal with people's attention span, to make it very personal journalism because people fix on television personalities, and to package it as attractively as Hollywood packages fiction. I bet we could double the share of audience." Well, we've done better than that. Our share this week in Chicago was forty-six percent.

The style. I stole that lock, stock and barrel from *Life* magazine. I was a big fan of *Life*. I'm convinced a lot of the popularity of *60 Minutes* is because we walked into the vacuum left by the death of *Look* and *Life*. They're back, but not the way they once were. They're back because they saw the success of *60 Minutes*. A magazine publisher took me to lunch the other day to find out how we're achieving the popularity it can't.

What kind of forces play into the kinds of stories you do? If 60 Minutes *pieces don't comprise a documentary, what are they?*

What we do is choose those things that I think will interest a broad cross section of the television audience. They are stories with sound and pictures. As for documentaries, I believe that the man or woman who does not have the attention span to watch an hour-long documentary is the same person who doesn't have the hour's attention span to read a book. So who are you reaching? You're not reaching anyone. Those people are well informed anyway. The guy who watches documentaries is probably well read. Documentaries are another thing that drive me up the wall. Fifty years ago a man named Flaherty made a documentary, a movie called *Nanook of the North*. And for some reason or another, television thinks that a documentary is the end-all and be-all of prestige programming.

I think the word "documentary" is the worst word in the world. It's a turn-off. Nobody likes to read documents – who wants to watch a thing called a "documentary"? I think you ought to sneak up on them. I think you ought to make information more palatable and documentaries don't make it palatable. They make it seem like "This is something I should watch because it's required." Like required reading in school, the books you had to read, not the ones you wanted to read.

And 60 Minutes *takes news, which is like spinach to a lot of people, and makes it very palatable. That's fascinating. It says that you must have a sense of show business and a real understanding of what television is all about. Can the* 60 Minutes *technique extend to other forms of television news?*

Let's talk about evening news for a minute. Cronkite gets about a twenty-seven percent share of the audience and Chancellor gets about a twenty-five and ABC gets about a twenty-one.* Now add those up. Seventy-three percent of the people with television sets on are watching an evening newscast. That's pretty dynamite stuff. Forget who's here [in the ratings] and who's there. They do their job rather well. But I have a luxury that they don't have – I don't have to cover everything. I can do what I want to do. They can't; they have to cover certain things. They're lucky when a story they have to tell happens to be a fascinating one. But that doesn't always happen, and that gives them problems.

Has any TV executive in the entertainment industry taken you to lunch to find out how you do it?

No, but the guys at the other networks are trying to copy us. Everybody says, "*60 Minutes* is such a big success. Why shouldn't we do the same thing?" And I say that's exactly as if somebody said "*All In The Family* is a big success. Why don't we do a show about a bigot who lives in Queens?" I say, "That's great. If you've got Norman Lear and Carroll O'Connor and Sally Struthers and Jean Stapleton and Rob Reiner you have a hit. If you don't, you know what you've got? You've got a memo." And that's what so many people in this business have. They know how to put it in memos,

** These figures are for early 1979. As we've seen, audiences do shift their allegiances, and newscasts are no exception. Find out which network news program is currently number one in the nation.*

but they don't know how to put it on the air. Unless they have Morley Safer, Dan Rather, Mike Wallace, and Harry Reasoner, the twenty producers, and the twenty film editors I have, they can't do it.

We're told that CBS stuck with 60 Minutes *in the early days when the ratings weren't as good.*

Yes, but it was prestige programming right off the bat. It was winning every award. You look around this office – Ohio State, Peabody critics' awards. They just poured in here.

But did you have the ratings?

No, we didn't have the ratings but we were winning the brownie points. We were making the network worth more because of our prestige. We made the name "CBS" shine bright.

But charges of yellow journalism have been directed at 60 Minutes.

You don't sit up there on top and do what thousands of other broadcast journalists have tried to do successfully and not get sniped at. Impossible.

What about the issue of checkbook journalism then?

First of all, I am ninety-nine percent sure that you shouldn't pay the subject. I'm one percent unsure. Let me ask you something. You're a publisher of a newspaper. It's 1946 or '47, and all of a sudden Adolph Hitler shows up alive in Argentina, and for a million dollars, you could have the Adolph Hitler story for your newspaper. Would you pay it? You're darn right you'd pay it. Let me ask you something else. There are two ways that a person unburdens himself of what's on his mind. One way is that he commits it to paper. The other way is that he speaks the words. Why is it that people are furious at Ron Ziegler for being paid to speak on college campuses while nobody was very upset that Jeb Magruder was paid for writing a book on the same subject?* Some people speak words, some people write words. Why is it legitimate to be paid for the words you commit to paper and not for the words you speak?

Could you answer your own question and tell me a little more about the relationship of checkbook journalism to broadcast journalism?

It's a very difficult problem to all of us. As a rule it's a good thing to stay away from, that of paying anybody for anything: to sometimes pay other journalists for leading them to stories, as we did with a guy named Chuck Medlin, who was going to deliver us Jimmy Hoffa's body, which he never did, and we were out of the money. It's a good thing if money doesn't change hands. This reminds me that once Charlotte Curtis of the *New York Times* was on a panel with Dick Salant [then president of CBS News, now vice-chairman of NBC] and the question of payment came up. The *Times* paid Svetlana Stalin for her memoirs, they bought the Churchill memoirs, they bought the Nixon memoirs; they paid for them, but they happen to work with the printed word. Everybody was incensed that David Frost was paying Nixon for his *spoken* word. They were all upset about the amount of money we in broadcasting pay versus what newspapers pay. It reminds me of a story: Winston Churchill once sat next to a woman at dinner and said, "Would you spend the night with me for a hundred pounds?" And she said, "Yes, I think I would." He said, "Would you spend the night with me for five pounds?" She said, "What do you think I am?" He said, "We've already established that. Now it's just a matter of price."

Think about the words that the *New York Times* pays for when they commit it to paper. That's not called checkbook journalism. But it is, because they're keeping other people from having the Nixon story or the Churchill story. And they're paying principals of news for their own words, which may be even a greater transgression because there's no questioning. I will bet you that when Kissinger's book comes out, somebody buys the rights to that book. I think it's much more honest, if you have to buy it, to buy just the right to cross-examine Kissinger about Cambodia and Laos and Vietnam than just blithely to accept his version of history.

And if he vacillates or equivocates, you've got that on film.

Right.

It seems that broadcast journalists have to live by different standards.

Sure. Because television stations operate by government license, and newspapers don't. Therefore we are always conscious of pressures in the local community for a station to lose its license. Stations are at the end of the line for us. They are the way that we reach the public, and they are always worried about their licenses being renewed. Newspapers' licenses are not renewed!

Do you worry about pleasing the station?

No. But there are legalities. There are more ways in broadcasting to run afoul of the law than there are in newspapers. Let me tell you about the newspaper way of doing things. Tell me why the word "ad" is a clean word and the word "commercial" is a dirty word. Why is "circulation" a clean word and "rating" a dirty word? Newspaper columnists talk about the decibel level of commercials versus the rest of the program. Why did the ad for the used-car dealer in Louisville, Kentucky, run in bigger type than the headline JOHN F. KENNEDY ASSASSINATED IN DALLAS? It was shouted in a much higher decibel count. They talk about commercial interruptions. Why do I read a story on page one of the *New York Times* and when it jumps* I have to look for it somewhere between the Macy's ad and the Gimbel's ad?

You've said before that you think the "talking head" approach works well. Could you explain that?*

Talking heads are the most fascinating things on television. An interesting face, with a mouth that has something to say, is the *best* thing on television. I looked at a story just now which has talking heads. Fascinating! All about the great authors who live in Ireland because they don't pay any taxes on their work. Fantastic! It's faces and people! We hate to admit it, those of us who work in it – television is more a medium of people and personalities than it is of ideas.

** Figures in the Nixon administration in the early 1970s. Ziegler was press secretary. Magruder was an official in Nixon's re-election campaign and was implicated in the Watergate scandal.*

** jumps: continues to another page.*

** talking head: television and film jargon (usually with a negative connotation) for a continuous close-up shot of a person talking – usually in a documentary or public affairs program.*

Did you know that every *60 Minutes* producer worth his salt is as good a casting director as David Merrick or Darryl Zanuck? It's the people they find. We found a little deaf co-ed at Gallaudet College in Washington named Deidre Bylock. She was so good that Jackie Cooper called me the next day and said, "Where do I find her? I want to use her in a movie." Those are the kinds of people who make the screen come alive. They're the magnet. That's what holds people to the set.

But doesn't it also have something to do with your lighting team and your camerapeople?

Oh, listen! There, you've got a Mike Wallace and a Morley Safer and a Dan Rather and a Harry Reasoner. They could be, for argument's sake, Clark Gable, Tyrone Power, Paul Newman, and Robert Redford. You put those four guys in lousy movies and they wouldn't be around much longer. A great newspaperman can write a sensational column, but if it's full of typos and the type is blurred, it's not going to get read.

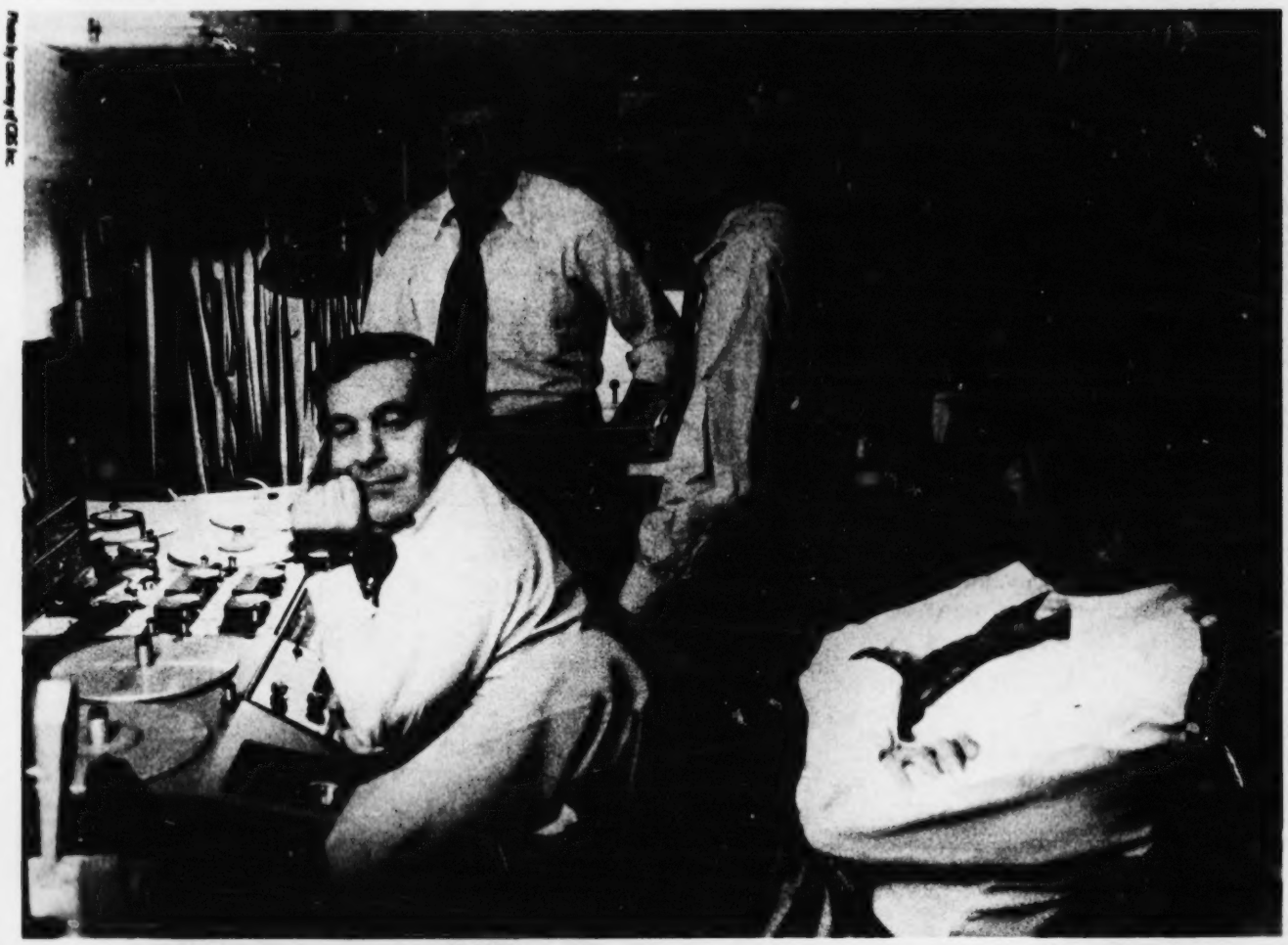
Would you say 60 Minutes *is a team effort?*

Absolutely. The camera crew and the producer who goes out with him are the vehicle through which Mike, Morley, Dan, and Harry report. In many other television shows, guys are writing scripts to film. Too often it's nothing but captions. We don't write scripts to film. We make films to illustrate a story one of our reporters wants to tell. I'll give you an example. When Jim Schlesinger went to China between the time he was Ford's Secretary of Defense and Carter's energy czar, *60 Minutes* was invited to send a camera crew. There was no room on the plane for Mike, Morley, or Dan (Harry was not with us then). And I said, "Thanks a lot, but no thanks." That's like telling James Reston he can send his typewriter, but there's no room for him. The film crew is only a tool. If there's anything wrong with television today there's too much preoccupation with hardware, with satellites and cameras and videotapes and superimpositions. Nobody pays enough attention to the content. I think that our audience appreciates the attention we pay to the content. I think they appreciate the fact that we have in many ways become the ombudsman* for people who have legitimate grievances and have no other way to air them.

So it extends from the people on top. You've got stars and the whole support around them.

The whole support is to make

* *ombudsman: a go-between, usually between citizens and government officials.*



The 60 Minutes *team (minus Harry Reasoner) in film editing, from left: Morley Safer, Dan Rather, Mike Wallace, with producer Don Hewitt (seated, right). Says Hewitt, "They could be, for argument's sake, Clark Gable, Tyrone Power, Paul Newman, and Robert Redford."*

the visual presentation compliment the story that a reporter is trying to tell.

Why is this so hard to find elsewhere in television?

Because I'm a very lucky man. God, in his infinite wisdom, bestowed upon me Mike Wallace, Morley Safer, Dan Rather, and Harry Reasoner, and bestowed upon me enough good sense to know what to do with that gift. I've talked with people at NBC, and they say, "How can we do what you're doing?" And I say, "If you're willing to peel off David Brinkley, John Chancellor, and Edwin Newman from everything else they do, you've got a fighting chance. It's the only way." CBS is the only network with enough bench strength to take four Super Bowl quarterbacks and put them on one team. Who else can do that? Who else has got those guys? I walk down that line of those offices – Mike Wallace, Dan Rather, Morley Safer, and Harry Reasoner – and I feel like I'm walking down the dugout of the old New York Yankees with Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig and the rest of them. And again I come back to the fact that it is no coincidence that the four most popular broadcasters in television journalism are also the four hardest-working.

What about Walter Cronkite?

Walter Cronkite stands by himself. There are, in our business, some giants. I was privileged to work with Ed Murrow, who was one. Eric Sevareid was another. Walter Cronkite is another. John Chancellor is one, David Brinkley is one, Chet Huntley was one, and Barbara Walters is one. To get back to money briefly, everybody was outraged that Barbara Walters got a million dollars a year. Whoever said that there is something wrong with someone getting rich on journalism? Did anybody care that William Randolph Hearst got to be a multi-multi-multimillionaire on journalism? Or Henry Luce [of Time]?

But it's different . . .

It's *not* different! It is *journalism*! And if journalism is a public utility, then Hearst shouldn't have gotten rich, and Henry Luce shouldn't have gotten rich, and Punch Sulzberger [of the *New York Times*] shouldn't be rich.

Do you know what is the biggest money-maker broadcast in all of television? *60 Minutes*. It makes more money than any other broadcast on television. It gets as much per minute for commercials as any broadcast in television and costs about a third of what other broadcasts, top money-makers, cost. Do you know what it would cost if you wanted to buy, as a sponsor, one Sunday of *60 Minutes*? It would cost you over a million dollars, for the six commercials on one Sunday. So it's a money-making business. We've accomplished here what's never been done before in this business. Every television producer looks for one of two things. He either looks for wide audience acceptance, *à la Laverne and Shirley, Mork and Mindy, Happy Days*, or he looks for prestige, *à la See It Now, Omnibus, Profiles in Courage, Playhouse 90*. Never before in the history of this business has any one show ever had both. That's by design. I studied this thing. I said, "There is a fascination with reality and nobody's ever known how to present reality. The documentaries are very good, but they're marketed all wrong." We did a thing on illegal aliens and the ad said, "Ten o'clock tonight, *CBS Reports* presents illegal aliens with Bill Moyers." You know what that ad should have said? "Ten o'clock tonight, the Gonzales brothers" should have been the name of it. "Come along and watch the immigration service chase two wetbacks through the back alleys of Los Angeles." Now, people would have learned just as much. You would have done what you had to do; you would have gotten them in the tent.

I think that may be television news's major problem; they don't know how to get them in the tent.

Boy, do I know that. You don't know how many hours I spend with that one.

One more question, at least for now. Is there space for documentaries like that, for CBS Reports *again, now that* 60 Minutes *has been so successful?*

Yes, if they market them and merchandise them in a way that will get people to watch.

What if you took one of your guys out? Would they have time to do it?

No. They had the guy. Bill Moyers. They didn't know what to do with him. They shouldn't have called it *CBS Reports* either. The three worst titles in the world are *CBS Reports, NBC White Paper*, and *ABC Close-up*. *CBS Reports* should have been called *Listen to America*, the title of Moyers's book.

See It Now *was just right there on that line.*

But *See It Now* went off the air because too few people watched it. Did you know that several times as many people watched Ed Murrow on *Person to Person* when he was looking at Marilyn Monroe's closet as watched Ed Murrow when he was attacking McCarthy on *See It Now*?

But Joe McCarthy had all the press and all the history books, and that's of course much more respectable.

That's what I'm saying. What we've been able to do is combine it. What I did was, I looked at Ed Murrow of *Person to Person* and Ed Murrow of *See It Now* and said, "There is a way to marry those two and get both."

Top: Edward R. Murrow, foremost broadcast journalist of the 1940s and '50s. Bottom: Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose career of fear-mongering rapidly declined after the March 1954 broadcast of See It Now.

Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

5.7 *Fred Friendly writes of his days with Edward R. Murrow, and particularly of a* CBS Reports *episode entitled "Harvest of Shame," a documentary that exposed the plight of migrant farm labor in 1960.*

Harvest of Shame

by Fred Friendly
from *Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control . . .*
Random House, 1967

In the fall of 1960 we broadcast "Harvest of Shame." Without other duties to divert him, Murrow was deeply involved in it. Even then his respiratory attacks were increasing, but he insisted on joining David Lowe, the producer, in the completion of his devastating study of the plight of the men, women and children who help to make us the best-fed people on earth. It was Lowe's first assignment with *CBS Reports*, and he had lived with the migrants for almost a year as they worked their way up from Florida's orange and tomato crops, through Georgia's peaches, the Carolinas' beans, and Virginia's corn, to the lettuce patches of New Jersey and the potato fields of Long Island. It was Murrow's kind of story, and as he stood in the rich Florida farmland describing the dawn shape-up, all the anger and eloquence of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* seemed to emerge. Together Murrow and Lowe fashioned a document of man's exploitation of man that was full of anguish and outrage. When it was broadcast on the day after Thanksgiving, it shocked millions of viewers.

Though "Harvest of Shame" attempted to reflect the growers' point of view as well, most of them were their own worst witnesses, and the president of the American Farm Bureau Federation lobby, interviewed on the report, compounded their lack of social consciousness by saying: "We take the position that it's far better to have thousands of these folks [the migrant workers] who are practically unemployable, earning some money, doing some productive work, for at least a few days in the year."

Secretary of Labor James Mitchell, interviewed on the program, said that in all his years in business and government he knew of no greater pressure group than that leveled against anyone who attempted to improve the plight of these forgotten Americans. Murrow's ending was in the *See It Now* spirit and left no doubt where he stood: "The people you have just seen have the strength to harvest your fruit and vegetables. They do not have the strength to influence legislation. Maybe we do. Good night, and good luck."

Not since McCarthy had we done a broadcast that created such impact, and never again would any of our programs create such clamor for change. Those migrants who were able to see it, as well as Secretary Mitchell and a few senators who cared, congratulated us. The big growers and their lobbyists yelled foul. They claimed that some of Lowe's Florida scenes had been photographed years before, and that the whole picture was distorted. They were wrong; it was a faithful, completely verified document. But the pressure from growers on the sponsor, a tobacco company, was so intense that they buckled and sent agents through the agricultural community apologizing for the program.

5.8 *"The miracle of 'Migrant,'" writes Les Brown, "was that it was televised at all." Planned by NBC as a ten-years-after follow-up to CBS's hard-hitting "Harvest of Shame," the program overcame enormous political and business pressure before being broadcast. What pressures were exerted on the network to keep this program off the air?*

Migrant

by Les Brown
from *Television: The Business Behind the Box*
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971

Good documentaries were bad business for broadcast companies that had allowed themselves to become extensions of the advertising industry and had no insulation from the petty political purposes of legislators and governors, who could retaliate in a number of different ways. Not only was there the expense of producing and presenting the programs, but also the added costs of legal defense, flights to Washington for testimony, and occasional losses of business from advertisers. And added to the burden of paperwork and correspondence were the man-hours, particularly the absorption of top management officials diverted from gainful business activities.

Courage is a requisite for good journalism, and courage is not easy to ask from companies that must answer to stockholders, advertisers, affiliated stations, and the source of their own valuable licenses – the government – before they answer to the public.

It is perhaps not coincidental that the television documentary flourished, locally as well as on the networks, during John F. Kennedy's time as President and went into swift decline afterward. The climate of enlightenment generated by the Kennedy Administration was conducive to journalistic searching into social ailments and blight; later, with the beginnings of polarization in the society, the searcher became suspect, as though his purposes were sinister instead of salutary.

For practical reasons, the TV networks let the documentary fade as a program form and, to keep up appearances, adopted instead the magazine format done so well by Canadian television, compendia of short pieces mixing together light and serious subjects with an occasional investigative film. The few full-length documentaries televised by the networks in any year would in the majority confine themselves to safe subjects, with an occasional bold examination of an aspect of the war in Indochina, a national reality that could not go ignored too long.

ABC went beyond the selection of "soft" subjects for its documentaries to the extent of letting the principal sponsors of its news specials – Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing [3M], B. F. Goodrich, and North American Rockwell – make the determination of subject matter from a list of documentary topics suggested by ABC News. One of the projects that appealed to 3M during 1969 was a program on the railroads. It was listed by ABC under the working title of *The Death of the Iron Horse*, but at the sponsor's behest it went into production as *The Golden Age of the Railroad*, an alteration of title that dictated also a change in the program's concept. The advertiser wanted to do a program on railroads, but not from a negative view. Thus, in a year when railroad service was deteriorating, and when a news organization might have

provided a public service by calling attention to the railroad crisis that was to be severely felt in the country during 1970, ABC offered an ode to the glories of railroading.

So cautious had the networks become in the production of searching documentaries that three of CBS's finest investigative reporters were left to sit for months without assignments. Jay McMullen, Gene DePoris, and Martin Carr were the forgotten men of CBS News, "the ghost unit," as they called themselves. Through the long arid period they occupied themselves writing memoranda to their bosses suggesting new documentary projects, some of which produced a response but little more. McMullen, who had been responsible for *Biography of a Bookie Joint* among other muckraking programs, proposed a documentary on corruption in Saigon. The project was considered for a time by his superiors and then abandoned. Later he was assigned to film a program on patent medicines, and then was ordered to fold the project. DePoris had started work on a program about the military-industrial complex, and that, too, was scuttled.

McMullen took a year's leave of absence, and Carr accepted an offer to join NBC News. There he proposed a follow-up program to *Harvest of Shame*, re-examining what the Murrow-Lowe documentary had found to be the lot of the migrant worker in 1960. Permitted to make a preliminary survey, he returned from Florida with a strong recommendation that the network go forward with it. NBC News president Reuven Frank gave his approval.

The miracle of *Migrant* was that it was televised at all. Television news had been under constant fire in Washington ever since the political conventions of 1968, and particularly as a result of the telecast of the Democratic nominating ceremonies in Chicago during which CBS and NBC gave coverage to the demonstrations and street violence, cutting away periodically from the convention rites at the International Amphitheatre. Most Democrats were convinced that their attention to the violence had cost Hubert Humphrey the election for the presidency. Meanwhile, the Nixon Administration and Republicans generally were sure that the networks were anticonservative. Both sides were vengeful and distrustful of the television's power, and the conservatives in particular were enjoying a campaign, led by Vice President Agnew, to discredit television news as biased. It was not an auspicious time for a hard-hitting exposé that would make waves in the business world which might wash into the political sphere.

As if that were not reason enough for strategic silence, business conditions were poor in 1970 and the networks deeply involved in austerity programs to keep their profits up. President Nixon's penchant for scheduling his speeches and press conferences in prime time (the primest time, 9:00 pm), knocking out commercial programming, was costing them millions; and, with *Migrant*, NBC would be subtracting yet another revenue-producing hour from its evening schedule. Finally, the network would be presenting a program that would embarrass, possibly hurt, one of its regular ad-

Children at a migrant camp, in a scene from Harvest of Shame, *a documentary that shocked its viewers.*

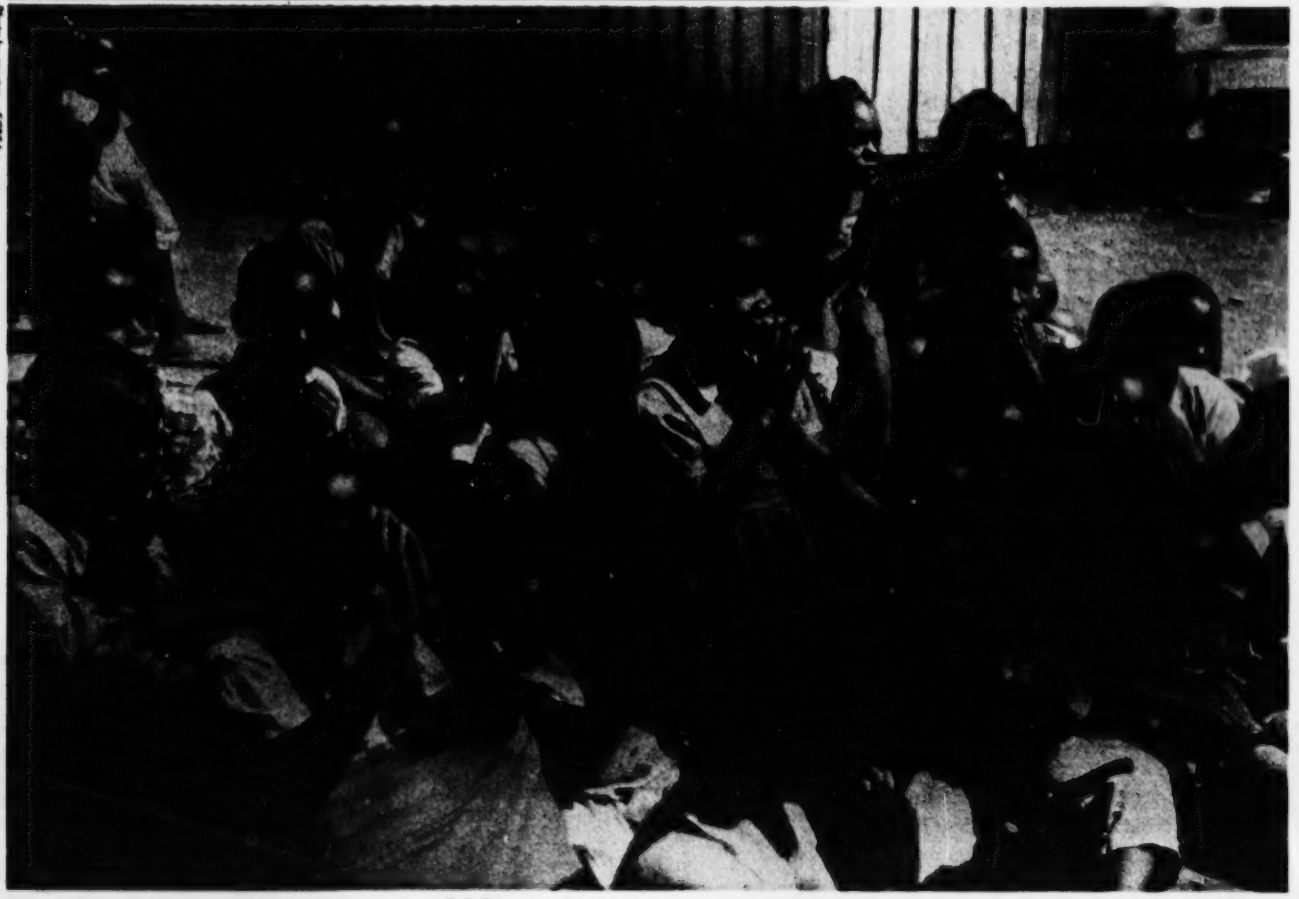


Photo by courtesy of CBS Inc.

vertisers. Coca-Cola had already spent more than $2 million with NBC for participation spots in the new fall line-up, scattered over a dozen shows, and while it probably would not cancel the purchases as a result of *Migrant*, the prospects could not be good for a renewal of its business.

The efforts to suppress *Migrant*, or at least to dilute it, began about a month before the telecast. Although, to that point, no one outside the network had seen the film, NBC's announcements to the press gave sufficient hint that Carr's film would show the wretchedness of the migrant worker's life, and that, whatever else, it would not be sympathetic to the fruit growers. Too, Carr's movements among the migrants were known to growers, so was the trend of his questions.

The Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association sent out a series of letters, which might be described as warnings. One was to Chet Huntley, who narrated the film, suggesting that NBC might not be in possession of all the facts, and then purporting to document the ways in which living and working conditions for the agricultural migrants had improved since *Harvest of Shame*. On June 22, letters went to both Dean Burch, chairman of the FCC, and Julian Goodman, president of NBC, from the Washington law firm L. Alton Denslow and Joseph O. Parker, representing the Association. Burch was told that although NBC had been furnished with "documented, factual information" to the contrary from the Association, indications were that NBC would televise a film reporting that little or nothing had been done in Florida to improve the lot of the migrant worker. Such a biased presentation, the letter stated, "could result in grave injustice to the people of the state of Florida, particularly the workers and their employers."

And then the key paragraph:

"If the film is shown by a licensee of the Commission and is in fact a slanted news presentation, Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association will request the Commission to specify and issue as to whether such a licensee is adequately discharging its responsibility so as to warrant its continuing to be a licensee."

This was a threat – cutting through legalese – that any station carrying the program was in danger of being challenged.

The letter to Goodman requested that "you bring the views which we express here to the responsible operators of each station to which this documentary will be offered."

About two weeks before the telecast, NBC's affiliated stations received a letter from the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association:

"This Association is in receipt of news which has caused us great concern over the possibility of NBC News televising a completely slanted documentary on migrants and migrant conditions in Florida.

"Our Washington attorneys have registered our concern with the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission and to the president of NBC. We are attaching copies of this correspondence for your information and consideration. . . ."

The purpose of the enclosures, of course, was to alert them that notice had been served on their licenses.

On Wednesday, July 15, the day before the telecast, the documentary was screened over closed circuit to the NBC affiliates, a standard practice with almost every television special or series episode – especially if in any way controversial – so that the station managements might make their determination as responsible licensees to clear the time for the broadcast. Don Mercer, vice-president of affiliate relations for NBC, went on camera to preface the screening with word of the Association's objection to the program, but he said that those involved in the program had given assurances that it was an honest and accurate report.

In Houston, where Coca-Cola Foods is headquartered, the company learned of the screening, and two representatives requested permission of KPRC, the Houston affiliate, to attend it. While normally the screenings are only for the immediate affiliate family and not for outsiders, the station consented, being unsure of its obligation in light of the controversy. Coca-Cola representatives then descended on NBC headquarters, and late into the afternoon of the air date they were demanding cuts in the program from Goodman and Frank. Hours before air time they were accommodated with a single excision in the film, not sufficient, however, to keep *Migrant* from implicating Coca-Cola Foods along with the other companies exploiting the pickers.

After the broadcast, the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association dispatched another letter to NBC, calling the program "biased and inaccurate" and asking for equal time to answer it.

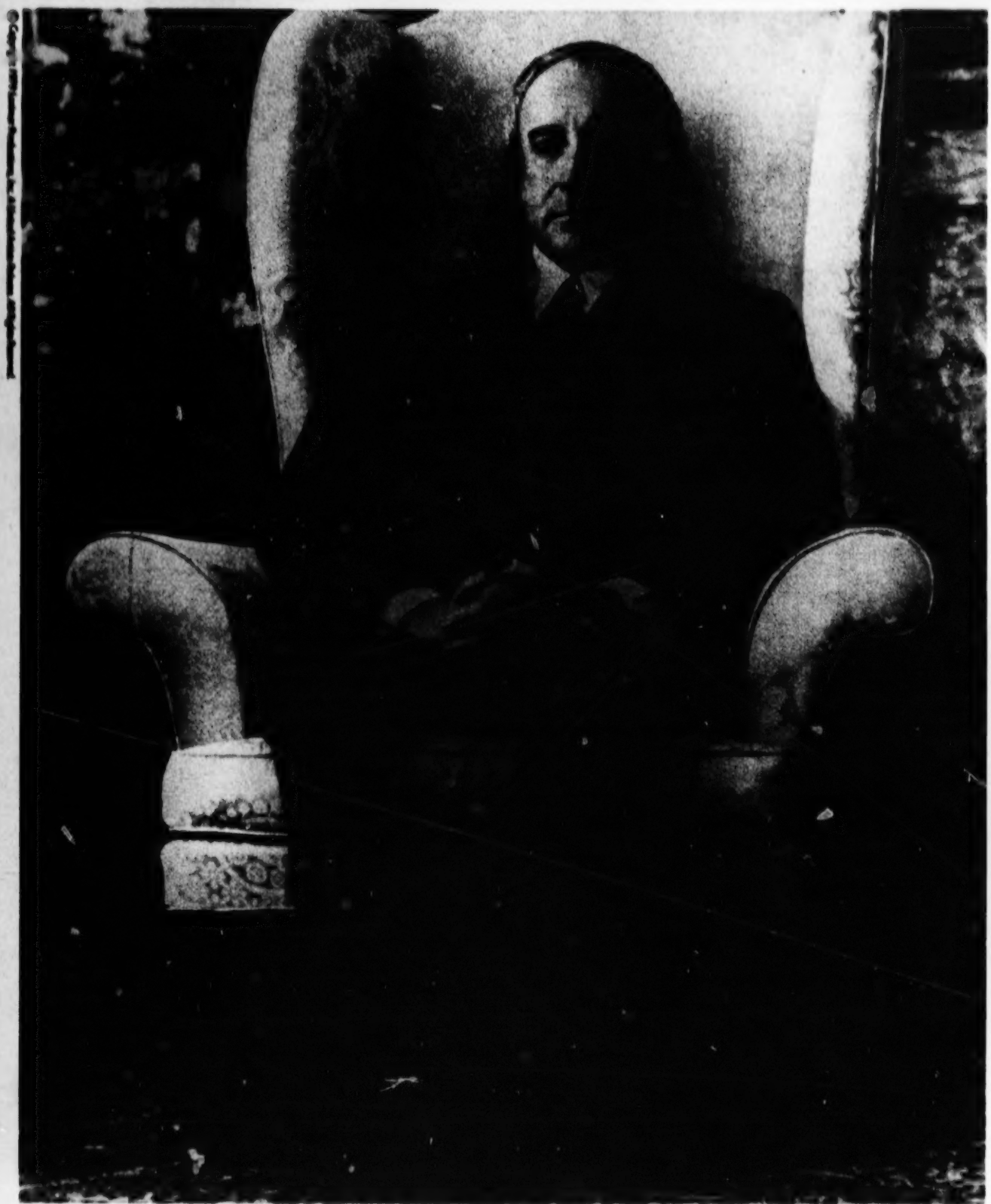
The statement, by the Association's manager of the labor division, George F. Sorn, read: "It does not appear that NBC made any substantial effort to balance the one-sided presentation in spite of the fact that they had in their possession massive factual documentation provided by this Association which clearly shows the many improvements made before the program was filmed. Based on the apparent inaccuracies and bias, and because of their damaging aspects not only to Florida agriculture and the state of Florida but also to the workers themselves, we will request equal time so that a proper balance may be offered to the nation's television viewers."

A week after the broadcast, the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, headed by Senator Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota, opened hearings on the treatment of migrant workers, and Carr, who produced the film, was among those called to testify. Another was J. Paul Austin, president of Coca-Cola, Inc., who had figured in the pressures brought upon NBC in a small way. He had put in a call to Goodman, as one corporation president to another, asking that he meet with the Coca-Cola representatives just before the telecast. For most of the week that followed, he conferred with various advisers, including McCann-Erickson, on what to do about the NBC program and how to proceed at the Mondale hearings.

When he appeared before the subcommittee, Austin testified that the NBC documentary had correctly presented the housing and working conditions of migrants as deplorable. He condemned the ill treatment of the migrant farm workers and vowed to transform the migratory work force into a stable, year-round group with the same fringe benefits as other Coca-Cola employees, including health insurance, job security, and vacations. The long-range plan to correct the conditions would begin in September, he said, and would be completed in seven years.

NBC did not grant the Florida Association equal time.

In January, Coca-Cola shifted all its network billings to CBS and ABC.



Peter Sellers as Chance, from the United Artists film version of Kosinski's Being There.

Unit 6 The Television Environment

Mr. Franklin shuffled the papers on the desk and drew out a page filled with fine print. "It's a simple formality," he said, handing the paper to Chance. "Would you be kind enough to read it now and – if you agree to it – to sign it where indicated?

Chance picked up the paper. He held it in both hands and stared at it. He tried to calculate the time needed to read a page. On TV the time it took people to read legal papers varied. Chance knew that he should not reveal that he could not read or write. On TV programs people who did not know how to read or write were often mocked and ridiculed. He assumed a look of concentration, wrinkling his brow, scowling, now holding his chin between the thumb and forefinger of his hand. "I can't sign it," he said returning the sheet to the lawyer. "I just can't."

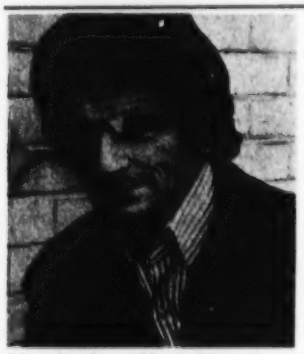
"I see," Mr. Franklin said. "You mean therefore that you refuse to withdraw your claim?"

"I can't sign it, that's all," said Chance.

"As you wish," said Mr. Franklin. He gathered his documents together. "I must inform you, Mr. Chance," he said, "that this house will be closed tomorrow at noon. At that time, both doors and the gate to the garden will be locked. If, indeed, you do reside here, you will have to move out and take with you all your personal effects." He reached into his pocket and drew out a small calling card. "My name and the address and phone number of our firm are on this card."

Chance took the card and slipped it into the pocket of his vest. He knew that he had to leave the study now and go to his room. There was an afternoon TV program he always watched and did not want to miss. He got up, said good-bye, and left. On the staircase he threw the card away.

– Jerzy Kosinski
from the novel
Being There
Harcourt Brace
Jovanovich, Inc., 1970



Novelist Jerzy Kosinski is also author of The Painted Bird *and* Steps.

Being There is the story of a man named Chance who has no parents or friends. For as long as he can remember, he has lived in the same house. He spends all his time watching TV or gardening. All he knows about the world he has learned from television and gardening. His life is simple until the house's owner, an old man living upstairs, suddenly dies. At this time, Mr. Franklin, the laywer handling the old man's estate, arrives and begins to complicate Chance's life by asking him to sign a document Chance can't even read. Chance can't read because television never taught him to read.

Although there are people who can't read, it is unlikely, if not impossible, that a person as dependent on television as Chance is could exist. It is even less likely that a person like Chance could rise to a position of importance. But in the book, Chance is eventually regarded as a financial expert – and so we call *Being There* a fantasy. However, this fantasy raises some interesting questions about learning from television. Suppose for a minute that it would be possible in our society for a person like Chance to live the life he led. What would such a person know about the real world?

Activity 1 Chances Are . . .

If a person were to grow up with only television as a guide to the real world, he or she would have certain information about the world that would be very different from ours.

Form groups and discuss what kind of education a person like Chance would have from television only. Then discuss the kinds of things such a person would not be exposed to. Be as specific as you can and write down your conclusions.

Jean Stapleton and Carroll O'Connor with Danielle Brisebois in Norman Lear's All In The Family.

Most of us know that a certain amount of what we see on television isn't real. We know when a criminal is gunned down by the FBI on a dramatic show that the actor will get up when the scene has been filmed and go home to wait for a paycheck. We may know also that Carroll O'Connor, the gifted actor who portrays the bigoted and cantankerous Archie Bunker, is a thoughtful and well-educated man with attitudes very different from those of the character he plays. Henry Winkler isn't Fonzie, Robin Williams isn't Mork, Valerie Harper isn't Rhoda, and Lassie isn't Lassie – as a matter of fact, through the years several different male dogs have played her.

Regrettably, there are also those for whom television unreality is a problem. From time to time we read in the newspapers of crimes which seem to have been inspired by things that people saw on television, including bomb threats, robberies, and murders. We hear about these unusual examples on the news. What we are not likely to know is that heavy television viewing (four hours or more per night) has been shown to affect the way some people perceive the world around them.

In 1973, a study was conducted to find out how heavy television viewers perceived the world as compared with light viewers. In four cities, questionnaires were passed out to an equal number of heavy viewers and light viewers (two hours or fewer per night), who were otherwise matched for sex and educational levels. The results show that the heavy viewers, in contrast to light viewers:

- overestimated the population of the United States in relation to the population of other nations;
- overestimated the proportion of people employed as athletes, entertainers, and professionals;
- overestimated the crime rate for their area;
- overestimated their own chances of being victims of violence, in terms of the crime rate for their area.

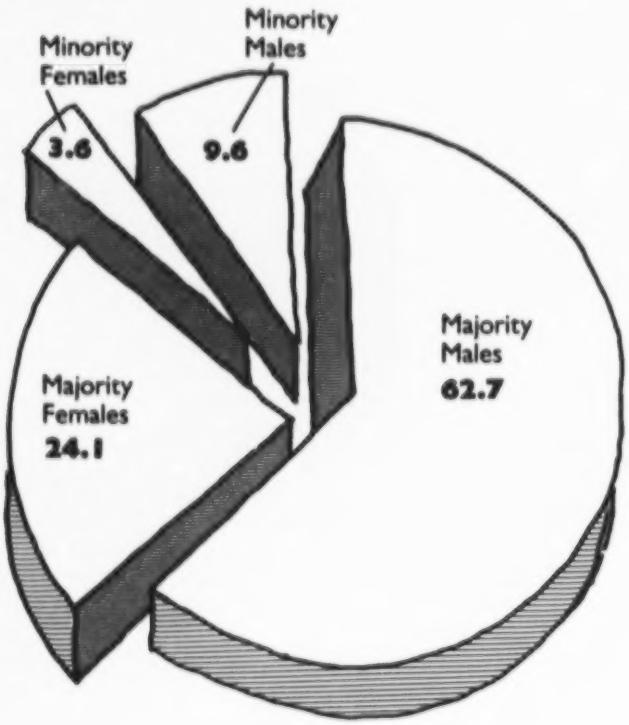
Of course, even heavy viewers usually understand that dramatic television programs aren't real – that they present fictional stories with fictional characters. And yet, television programs can be *realistic*. They provide us with an environment that penetrates our homes an average of six hours a day. No matter how skeptical we are about the truthfulness of these programs, we are inclined to learn – or to think we learn – from the realistic environment they expose to us. According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in their 1978 publication *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update:*

> *Television plays a [subtle] role: by showing us worlds we would otherwise seldom see, by determining the elements of those worlds on which to focus, and by presenting them in a contest of good and bad, television helps to shape what we know about our world, what we believe about it, and what we feel about it. We "learn" about police, courtroom and hospital procedures, and we are initiated into the inner workings of big business, the FBI, and organized crime. . . .*

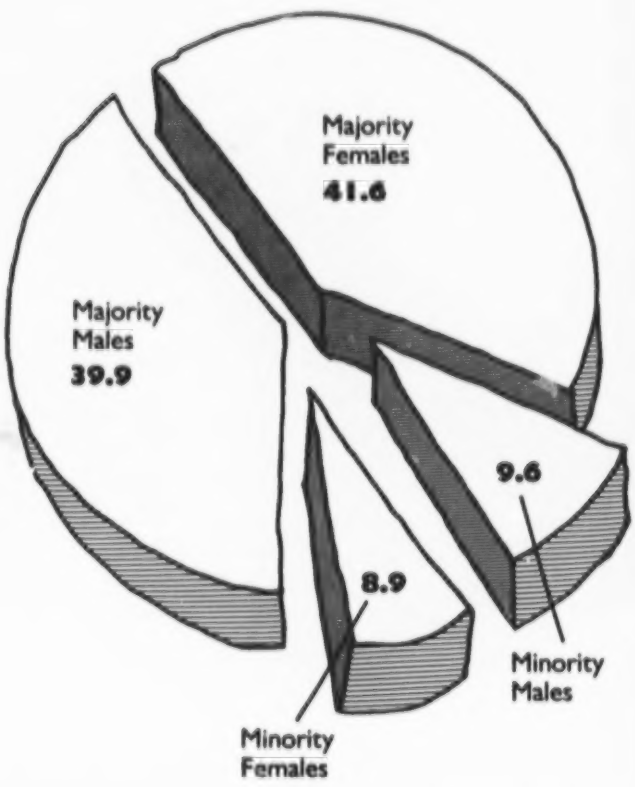
Slices of the Pie . . .

During 1975 through 1977, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission supported several studies to gather information about the content of television programs. One of those studies compared the number of minority (black, Hispanic, Asian-American, Native American) and majority (white) men and women appearing as major characters on dramatic programs, with their numbers in the general population. Over 5,000 television characters were classified in this study. The results appear below:

Sex and Race of Major Characters in Television Drama, 1975-77



U.S Population, 1976



Activity 2

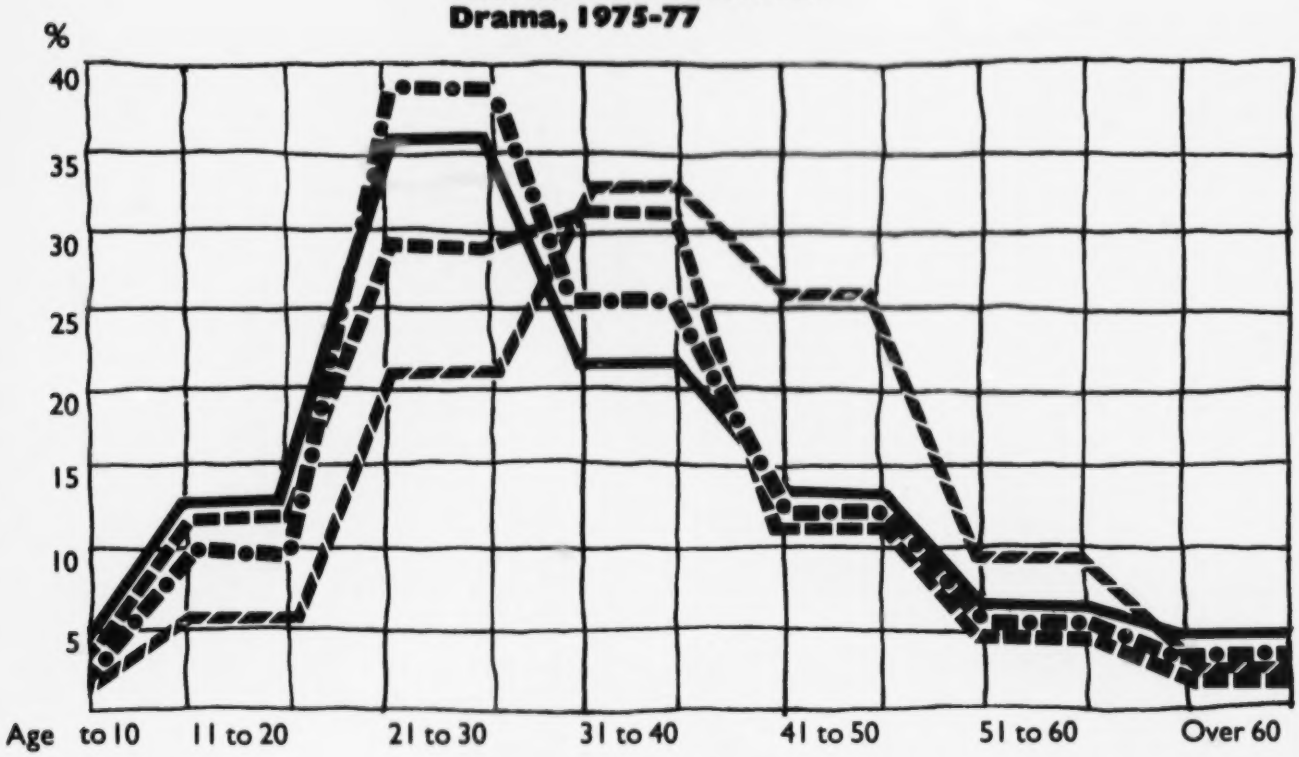
Surprises for the Hermit?

Examine and compare the two "pie" diagrams, and discuss:

1. Which group is most overrepresented on television?
2. Which group is least represented?
3. If a television hermit were to come out of hiding to join our society, do you think he or she would be surprised at the kinds of people he or she encountered? Why or why not?

Dramatic television programs give us a high concentration of characters aged twenty to forty, and underrepresent children and older people. Examine the chart below. Notice that each age group is broken down by race and sex:

Age Distributions of Characters in Television Drama, 1975-77



How to read this chart: "About 13% of all minority female characters between 1975 and 1977 were in the 11-to-20 age group," or, "About 39% of all majority female characters were in the 21-to-30 age group."

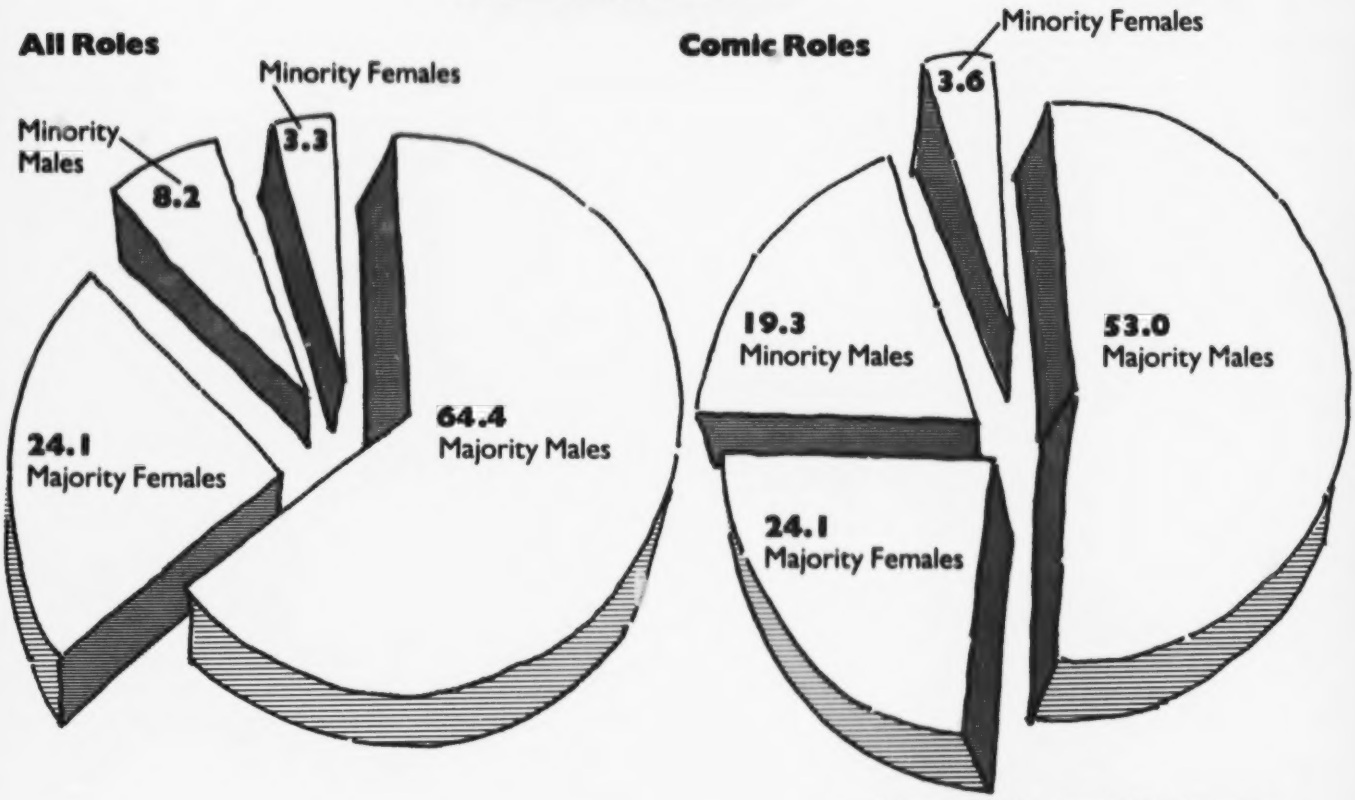
Activity 3

Drawing Conclusions

The Mary Tyler Moore Show's men over forty: Gavin MacLeod, Edward Asner, Ted Knight. This successful series of the 1970s offered a humorous portrayal of life in a television newsroom.

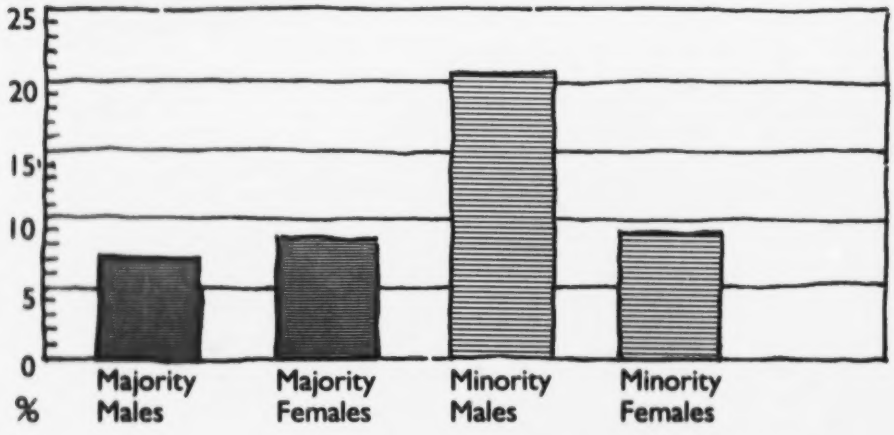
1. Look at the eleven-to-twenty age group on the preceding chart. What conclusions can you draw about how majority males and minority females were represented in this group? How about minority males? Majority females? What reasons can you suggest for this distribution? Does it seem realistic? Fair?
2. Compare how majority females and males were distributed between the two age groups twenty-one to thirty and forty-one to fifty. Why do you think television distributed men and women this way? Do you think this distribution has changed at all recently?
3. How does the distribution of minority males change from the thirty-one to forty range to the forty-one to fifty range? How about majority males? What do you conclude from that?

Distributions of Major Characters in All Roles and in Comic Roles in Prime Time, 1975-77



How to read this chart: "53% of all comic roles on prime time television between 1975 and 1977 were majority males."

Percentage of Major Characters Who are in Comic Roles, 1975-77



How to read this chart: "8.5 percent of all majority female characters were in comic roles between 1975 and 1977."

Activity 4

Funny, Isn't It?

From the charts above, it is clear that minority males were proportionately more prevalent as comic characters in the years shown than were people from the other three categories. White males, on the other hand, were proportionately less popular as comic figures.

From what you know, can you offer any reasons for this imbalance? Form small groups, discuss, and write down your main ideas. Compare ideas among groups, and see if your class as a whole draws similar conclusions. If most of the groups have the same ideas, or if different groups have different ideas, discuss why.

If you were to redraw the two charts above for this year, do you think you would change it?

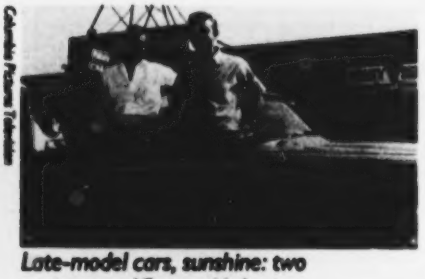
The central realities which television depicts may well be those dealing with power. Power can be expressed in many ways, only the crudest of which is violence and its outcomes. The basic reality of the television world is the reality of the American middle-class establishment; its morality is the conventional and rigid Sunday-school morality of the middle class; its heroes and villains are those of the great silent majority.

Power and success are the province of the white, the male, the middle/upper-middle class. If the ability to inflict violence without suffering it in return is a measure of power, such power is held by whites against non-whites and by males against females . . .

– Larry Gross
from "The Real World of Television"
Today's Education,
January-February 1974

Columbia Pictures Television

Upper-middle-class, white, male: Father Knows Best *depicted an idealized American family of the 1950s, and, as a rule, father knew best. From left, Elinor Donahue, Billy Gray, Laurin Chapin, and their television parents Jane Wyatt and Robert Young.*



Columbia Pictures Television

Late-model cars, sunshine: two young men (George Maharis and Martin Milner) chase adventure cross-country in their new Corvette in Route 66, *which aired from 1960 to 1964.*

We learn from television in unexpected ways. Even when we are being entertained, we are receiving serious messages we may not really be aware of at the time. But over a period of months or years of watching television, these messages influence us nonetheless. They can affect the way we think about what we see on television *and* the outside world.

In filmed television dramatic shows, the sky is almost always blue, the sunshine warm and bright, simply because almost all TV film production is done on location in southern California. This may seem trivial, but it makes us expect sunshine as the normal and natural outdoor setting for television, even if we live in a rainy part of the country ourselves. If it's overcast or raining on television, we're likely to expect the weather to play an important role in the program, either as a force in the plot or to set mood.

Television characters usually drive late-model American-made cars; generally sedans or convertibles, or occasionally, on family shows, station wagons. The automobiles are large, brand new and highly polished. Many television production companies are supplied these cars free by the manufacturers just to have them be seen on television.

These images – sunny days and late-model American cars – are television messages. They are not by themselves terribly important. But when combined with the rest of television's environment they take on an added meaning. Long television exposure to images like these may create false expectations among some viewers that the television world – a fanciful and desirable place – is what real life should be.

Each of the following four sets of statements is about a different social problem as depicted on television. Compare the television message in each one with what you know to be true about your own world (your home, your community, the rest of the country).

1. Aging

"Aging in prime time drama (on television) is . . . associated with increasing evil, failure, and unhappiness. In a world of generally positive portrayals and happy endings, only 40 percent of older males and even fewer female characters are seen as successful, happy and good."

– Craig Aronoff in "Old Age in Prime Time," *Journal of Communication*, 1974

"In regard to 'success,' fewer of the elderly, especially elderly women are coded as 'successful' . . . the elderly, more than any other adult age group, portray roles that are somewhat comic; and, vice versa, fewer of the elderly portray serious roles."

– Nancy Signorielli, George Gerbner in "The Image of the Elderly in Prime-Time Television Drama," *Generations*, Fall, 1978

Television Message

Old people are more unhappy, unsuccessful, and evil than any other group.

Family's *Sada Thompson plays an independently spirited woman in this series, but many of the homemaking jobs fall to her while her husband practices law.*

2. Men and Women: Roles (1975-1977)

" . . . males are most frequently seen in police and criminal roles, while these roles are relatively infrequent for female characters."

"Males are seen as doctors, while females are seen as nurses."

"The homemaker role is frequent for female characters but not for male characters."

"Female characters are seen as secretaries, but . . . male characters are seen as managers."

"In 1977, 82.2% of all network news correspondents were white men, 8.9% were white women, and 8.9% were minority men. None were minority women."

– U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update* (1978)

Television Message

Women appear much less frequently, and in positions of much less authority, than men.

3. Solving Problems, Relieving Anger

"More than six out of ten (63.2%) of all 3651 major characters studied from 1969 through 1977 were involved in some kind of violence over the years. . . . The percentage of (dramatic) programs containing violence has usually ranged from 80 to 90 percent... the rate of violent episodes per hour rose to a record high of 9.5 in 1976; last year (1977) it dropped to 6.7 episodes per hour."

– George Gerbner, et al in *Journal of Communication* Summer, 1978

Television Message

Violence, through threatening, hurting, or killing, is frequently used as a way to resolve disputes.

"Beautiful people": Charlie's angels.

4. Appearances

With few exceptions, leading characters on dramatic (television) programs are "beautiful" people: the men are rugged and handsome (or distinguished-looking); the women are young, sexy-looking, pretty.

Some characters are identified with some part of the way they look: Kojak's shaved head, Columbo's trenchcoat and stooped posture, Fonzie's slicked hair and black leather jacket.

Television Message

An attractive, or distinctive, appearance is important if you want to be recognized.

Activity 5

The Medium's Messages

Choose one of the television messages above, or think of one on your own. Write 200-300 words describing in detail the differences between the television message and the "real world" message, drawing upon your own personal experiences.

Courage, daring, an unwillingness to reveal emotions: The Lone Ranger, played by Clayton Moore, always got his man.

One way in which television converts the world into uncomplicated manageable bits and pieces is to use familiar images that have been a part of our popular culture since long before electronic communication. Now, however, television provides a constant flow of these images to a huge public. Remember that it is not unusual for 40 million people to be watching the same prime time program at the same time on any given weeknight.

The western hero, for example, grew out of legends and pulp dime novels of the nineteenth century. The exploits of Buffalo Bill, Daniel Boone, and Billy the Kid were exaggerated and dramatized for enthusiastic readers in Eastern cities. Western movies, starring a host of cowboy actor heroes, continued to strengthen the myths of our frontier days and distribute them to an eager public. Television seized upon this national passion in the mid-1950s, and each network scrambled to outdo the other. Television westerns reached their peak in 1960, with more than 20 percent of prime time given over to gun-toting cowboys.

The western hero in our culture has become a *stereotype*, which is defined by the 1966 unabridged edition of *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* as "a simplified and standardized conception or image invested with special meaning and held in common by members of a group. . . ." Generally, stereotypes result from constant repetition in the media; we are continually exposed to similar or identical images over and over again until we recognize them instantly, even when they are only suggested to us. The American cowboy stereotype is no exception. All he has to do is ride across the screen for us to know who he is and what to expect of him. He is, of course, male, youthful, strong, silent, rugged in appearance and "good." He has little time for long-standing relationships

with women. He regularly triumphs over "bad." He is an expert shot, but won't fire unless fired upon. He is respected not only for his courage and daring but also for his unwillingness to reveal his emotions. Cowboys (like stereotyped Indians) don't cry. And for that matter they don't laugh very often, either.

There isn't much more that can be added to a description of this stereotype. It is, in fact, the nature of stereotypes that they can be fully described with a few carefully chosen phrases or adjectives.

Although the cowboy stereotype has its roots in nineteenth-century popular American culture, other stereotyped characters on television are more recent. Since television "edits" people, most of the characterizations we see on dramatic programs are incomplete. The most limited ones are often stereotypes; we recognize them by only a few easily defined personality traits.

See Readings 6.1 and 6.4, both of which have to do with television's treatment of minorities.

You can get much more out of television if you watch critically as well as just for entertainment. Think about the images of people you see. How are they being portrayed? In what ways are they realistic? How are they not realistic? Which are stereotypes? Which are shown in some depth?

When Push Comes to Shove . . .

Violence on television has been the subject of vigorous debate, especially over the last ten years. It has also been the subject of extensive research.

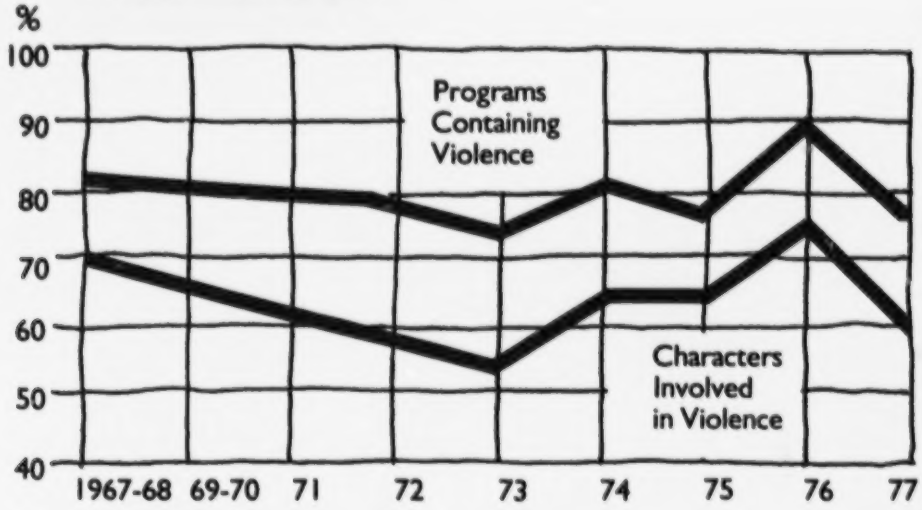
George Gerbner, professor, researcher, and dean of the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, is widely regarded as the country's leading authority on violence in television. He has devised a system for defining and observing the number of acts of violence on television, as cited in the Surgeon General's Report of 1972.

Although some critics dispute Dr. Gerbner's definition of a violent act, it is broadly accepted now as a good indicator of trends in television programming. It is

the overt expression of physical force against others or self, or the compelling of action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed.

Dr. Gerbner's research has led to the compiling of a variety of statistics about violence on television. The graph below shows the percentage of violence in dramatic programs (including weekend morning cartoons for children) from 1967 through 1977.

Percent of TV Programs Containing Violence, and Major TV Characters Involved in Violence



Over the same ten-year period, researchers also gathered data on what kinds of major characters committed violence or were victims of violence, according to age, sex, marital status, class, race and nationality. The results are in the following table:

			% Involved in Violence	% Involved in Killing
* N=number of characters studied.	All Characters	(N*=3651)	63.2	8.7
	All Males	(N=2740)	68.5	10.3
	All Females	(N=865)	45.1	4.3

Involvement of TV Characters in Violence, By Age and Sex	% Involved in Violence Males		% Involved in Killing	Females		
Children/adolescents	65.5	(N=278)	1.4	49.5	(N=109)	0.0
Young Adults	69.9	(N=512)	12.1	53.5	(N=241)	5.8
Settled Adults	65.7	(N=1176)	12.4	38.3	(N=462)	4.3
Elderly	48.6	(N=74)	6.8	36.0	(N=25)	8.0
Involvement of TV Characters in Violence, By Class						
Upper	68.4	(N=171)	17.0	43.0	(N=79)	10.1
Middle, mixed	68.2	(N=2469)	9.7	45.0	(N=762)	3.5

	% Involved in Violence Males		% Involved in Killing	% Involved in Violence Females		% Involved in Killing
Lower	77.0	(N=185)	12.0	54.2	(N=24)	8.3
Involvement of TV Characters in Violence, By Race						
Whites	65.3	(N=2079)	11.8	46.0	(N=768)	4.7
Other	61.9	(N=268)	10.1	30.6	(N=72)	0.0
Involvement of TV Characters in Violence, By Nationality						
U.S.	63.2	(N=2098)	11.6	42.7	(N=740)	4.3
Other	80.8	(N=203)	12.6	49.2	(N=61)	3.3

The same research project also categorized the kinds of characters who were more likely to be killers than to be killed, and more likely to inflict violence than to be victims of it. Here are some of the results for 1967 through 1977:

- Boys (children, adolescents) killed four times as often as being killed.
- All men killed twice as often as being killed.
- Old men were a little more likely to cause violence than to be victimized by it.
- Old women were three times more likely to be victimized by violence than to be the cause of it.
- No old women were portrayed as killers.
- Women in general were seen as victims of violence – much more likely to be hurt or killed than to do the hurting or killing.

Although violence on television declined in 1977 and again in 1978, the tables above indicate that it has long been standard fare for much of television drama. In 1977, despite the decline, there were six acts of violence per hour of dramatic programming, and about three out of four programs contained a violent incident of some kind: a physical threat or an attack in which someone was hurt or killed. Violence is a common device to arouse our attention, of course, but it is also used as a plot device – as a way to resolve conflict and therefore end a story. Even today, it is safe to say that television regularly portrays violence as a common everyday practice.

Activity 6

Portraits of Violence

Discuss in class the ways an act of violence on television is different from real-life violence. Consider not only how television portrays the act itself, but the consequences of the act as well. Refer to specific programs you have seen.

The Television Environment: Its Effects

In 1976, more than 600 elementary and junior high school students in New Jersey were asked, "How often is it all right to hit someone if you are mad at them? Is it almost always right, or almost never right?"

The students were divided into three groups: those who were light television viewers (no more than two hours per day), medium viewers (two to six hours), and heavy viewers (more than six hours). The figures below show the percentage of students, broken down by age, sex, parents' education, and amount of television viewing, who said that "it's almost always all right to hit someone if you are mad at them."

Percent Agreeing: "All Right to Hit Someone"			Television Viewing		
			Light (N=141)	Medium (N=339)	Heavy (N=161)
Overall		(N=625)	31	35	41
Grade in School	Sixth	(N=68)	20	37	44
	Seventh	(N=266)	35	32	41
	Eighth	(N=230)	35	39	40
	Ninth	(N=68)	17	28	33
Sex	Male	(N=304)	37	44	39
	Female	(N=328)	24	26	42
Parents' Education	Neither went to college	(N=228)	29	40	47
	Father or both went to college	(N=349)	33	29	36

Notice that, as a general rule, older students were less likely to agree with the statement than younger students. But also notice that a third of the heavy-viewing ninth graders agreed, compared to only 20 percent of the light-viewing sixth graders.

The same students were asked the question, "Would you be afraid to walk alone in the city at night?" The percentages of those who answered "yes" appear below:

Percent Agreeing: "Afraid to Walk Alone in the City at Night"			Television Viewing		
			Light (N=141)	Medium (N=339)	Heavy (N=161)
Overall		(N=623)	72	76	81
Grade in School	Sixth	(N=69)	90	71	74
	Seventh	(N=261)	74	77	83
	Eighth	(N=233)	68	76	80
	Ninth	(N=67)	71	72	83
Sex	Male	(N=299)	60	61	69
	Female	(N=331)	87	90	89

Parents' Education	Neither went to college	(N=228)	65	76	81
	Father or both went to college	(N=345)	73	75	82

In 1977, researchers asked more than 2,000 adults a number of questions about their attitudes toward crime. One question was, "Do you keep a gun for the purposes of protection?"

They were also asked to describe how often they watched television programs about crime and police, and were divided into light, medium, and heavy viewers according to their answers.

The percentages of those who kept a gun for protection are:

Percent Stating: "I Keep a Gun"			Television Viewing		
			Light (N=881)	Medium (N=887)	Heavy (N=629)
Overall		(N=2374)	19	21	29
Age	Under 30	(N=669)	20	20	30
	30-54	(N=920)	18	22	23
	55 and older	(N=772)	19	20	35
Sex	Male	(N=981)	24	26	35
	Female	(N=1394)	15	17	24
Education	No college	(N=1220)	20	22	28
	Some college	(N=1147)	18	19	29

Remember that about three out of every five major characters in television drama were involved in violence during the period 1967-1977. The 1970 U.S. Census indicates that in real life, there is only one chance in three hundred that a person will be involved in a violent crime.

It is apparent that level of television viewing is also related to the way people regard the United States's involvement in world affairs. In 1975, a survey asked some 1,400 adults, "Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs, or if we stay out of world affairs?" Those feeling the United States should stay out of world affairs, broken down by light viewers (fewer than two hours a day), medium viewers (three hours), and heavy viewers (four or more hours):

Percent Agreeing: Avoid World Affairs			Television Viewing		
			Light (N=707)	Medium (N=291)	Heavy (N=484)
Overall		(N=1420)	32	33	47
Age	Under 30	(N=391)	34	26	47
	30-54	(N=607)	26	32	41
	55 and older	(N=394)	39	41	54
Sex	Male	(N=649)	29	30	45
	Female	(N=779)	35	36	49
Education	No college	(N=985)	37	39	51
	Some college	(N=440)	23	21	30

Some have attempted to give reasons why heavy television viewers are much more inclined than light viewers to believe that this nation should stay out of world affairs. Television drama, it is said, presents an orderly world where outside threats to family or community are repelled, and evil is conquered. "World affairs," on the other hand, are complicated and dangerous; problems are not resolved in thirty or sixty minutes.

Research

There are many ways to conduct research studies. In testing the safety of drug products, for instance, it is the usual practice to use two groups of laboratory animals. One group (the *experimental* group) will be fed regular doses of a drug. The other group (the *control* group) doesn't receive the drug at all. If the experimental group of animals shows symptoms of side effects while the control group doesn't, that is usually considered proof that the drug caused the symptoms.

Designing a test to measure the effects of television on viewers has been very difficult; there are very few people in this country who watch no television at all and therefore could act as the control group. It would be practically impossible, in fact, to find anyone in this country who has lived completely free of television's influence.

To leap this hurdle, researchers usually seek out responses from light, medium, and heavy television viewers to note the differences between them. Though there is no "control group" as such, major differences can be seen in the way light and heavy viewers perceive the real world.

Many other kinds of studies have tried to evaluate television's effects upon viewers. Not long ago, some third and fourth grade students were divided into two groups: one group saw a violent television program, the other watch a nonviolent program. In an adjoining room, being watched by a video camera, some younger children were playing. They could be seen by the older children on video monitors. After both groups of older children had watched the television shows, they were asked to keep an eye on the younger children by watching the monitors. They were told to notify adults at the slightest sign of trouble. The children on the screen gradually became more aggressive and destructive, arguing with each other and knocking over furniture. The experimenters measured how long it took the older children to seek adult help. They found that those who watched the violent program were much slower to notify the researchers than were those who had seen the nonviolent program.

See Reading 6.2, "Television, Violence, and the Public Interest"

This experiment, and others, have led to the same conclusion: people who watch a lot of violence on television – especially children and adolescents – are *on the average* more likely to show agressive behavior, or be tolerant of seeing it, than those who watch little or no television violence.

Televised violence has long been in the public eye because in many ways it is the most obvious and distinctive of the things we see on television. Televised violence has also been seen as having the most notable of negative effects. But what of other images we see again and again on television?

Consider the possible effects of repeatedly watching:

- commercials for mouthwash, deodorants, perfumes, and other products to make us smell better;
- men and women portrayed in commercials and dramatic programs as sex objects;
- minority men and women portrayed primarily as comic figures;
- television families who live in expensive surburban homes, rarely argue, never raise their voices with each other, never fight;
- male heroes (policemen, detectives, space commanders, lawyers) who scarcely if ever show their emotions to us, whose power and authority are never questioned;
- advertisements that continually show scenes of the "good life": youth, activity, laughter, sunshine, and adventure;
- exhortations to buy, buy, buy.

See Reading 6.3, "In Conversation with Susan Harris"

Youth, sunshine, the good life: This is* Flipper, *starring Brian Kelly, Luke Halpin, and Tommy Norden. The adventure series aired from 1964 to 1967 and was filmed in Florida and the Bahamas.

The examples in this unit are just a few samples of the television environment that permeates our lives for an average of six hours a day. The total environment, however, is much broader and more complex than can be shown in just a few examples. The more you learn about television and the more critically you view it, the more able you will be to understand the complexity of its complete environment and recognize in what ways its environment is like and unlike your own.

Reading

6.1 *Although television during the 1950s and 1960s has been characterized as "lily-white" and dominated by males, women and minorities began to make strides during the 1970s. The reading below, excerpted from a 1977 publication by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, describes some of those changes. Does programming of the 1980s continue those changes? In what ways does television now reflect the diversity in our society?*

A New Realism ... or "Silly Meaninglessness"?

– from Chapter 1, *Window Dressing on the Set*, by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Blacks as Detectives

In 1973 the networks introduced black males as series leads using the same genre and formula. Their vehicles were "Shaft" and "Tenafly" which featured detectives who operated primarily in a white world using their wits to outsmart clean-cut, white-collar criminals.

"Shaft" was based on the movie of the same name. In the television version, which was directed to a predominantly white audience, much of the essence of the film character was removed. Donald Bogle, a student of blacks in film, described the whitewashing of television's "Shaft":

"It's like they poured a bottle of Listerine over him. In the first 'Shaft' movie his walking down the street in his leather coat was very authentic, sexual, even funky. On television his sensuality has been taken away from him."

Joel Dreyfuss, in Part I of a series of article on "Blacks and Television," described one network program executive's rationale for the whitewash:

" . . . (M)any of the 'Shaft' features, the violence, the ghetto characters, pimps, hustlers, and prostitutes, simply were not transferrable to a television program – black or white."

Dreyfuss dismisses this argument by recalling the frequency with which pimps, hustlers, and prostitutes appear on "Hawaii Five-O," "Kojak," and every crime show. The executive's second argument was that the all-black setting of the film had to be changed for the predominantly white audience: "Our responsibility is to provide entertainment for a broad spectrum of people."

Women and black leading characters could be inserted into the white man's world of television drama as long as they did not usurp his power. As a result, the female cop would still be saved by her male superiors, and her feminine guile, beauty, and sense of humor would be her sources of strength. To avoid black usurpation of the white man's power, "Shaft" and "Tenafly" would be emasculated and whitewashed. Despite or perhaps because of the whitewashing, neither "Shaft" or "Tenafly" lasted beyond their first season.

"Realism" in Situation Comedy

Norman Lear, who has produced several spinoffs – "Maude," "The Jeffersons," and "Good Times" – has also been instrumental in establishing a trend of realism in situation comedy. His technique has been to treat realistically – and humorously – controversial issues and contemporary social and personal problems.

The realistic situation comedies differ from those of the 1950s which featured a white, middle-class, suburban family whose wholesomeness and warmheartedness were a reassuring confirmation of American family life. "Make Room for Daddy," "Leave It To Beaver," and "Ozzie and Harriet" were typical of programs in which the husband-father always knew best and the homemaker-mother always supported him in their efforts to bring up the children well. Les Brown characterizes this portrayal of family life as "counterfeit" and argues that these programs avoided life's real problems:

"There is no death, no disease, no emotional illness, no sex anxiety, no real financial insecurity, no religious doubt, and no personal unfulfillment in TV's antiseptic households. . . ."

The situation comedies of the 1970s attempt to address these elements of life. "All In The Family" has treated such topics as compulsive gambling, menopause, breast cancer, aging, death, and rape. "Maude" has explored alcoholism, white liberalism, mental health, abortion, and changing sex roles. "Good Times" has dealt with venereal disease, hypertension, equal employment opportunity, and ghetto ripoffs.

Another characteristic of the new comedies is the diversity of characters who vary widely by race, social class, and marital style. "The Jeffersons," "Maude," and "Phyllis" feature upper-middle-class families, whereas "All In The Family" and "Good Times" are set in working-class households. "Sanford and Son" and "Chico and the Man" feature single men who work and live at a junkyard and garage, respectively.

"All In The Family," the pioneer in using the situation comedy as a format for the exploration of controversial issues, dealt most frequently in its initial stages with the racial and ethnic prejudice of its leading character, Archie Bunker. Archie was portrayed as a bigot whose racial or religious epithets were directed, indiscriminately, against anyone who was not a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

Archie's favorite targets were his next-door neighbors, the Jeffersons, the first black family on the block. "Maude," particularly in the early days, was portrayed as a white liberal whose good intentions were most frequently visited upon her black maid, Florida. Archie's bigotry and Maude's liberalism were the perfect foils for the development of strong, black supporting characters – Louise Jefferson and her son Lionel on "All In The Family" and Florida on "Maude" – who became leading characters in "The Jeffersons" and "Good Times."

Critical response to the new realism has been mixed. Soon after "All In The Family" premiered, it received both rave reviews and biting indictments. Ambivalent response may have been due, in part, to the ambiguity of its central character. Archie was portrayed as a bigot, albeit a lovable one. Underneath his irascible exterior there lay a warm heart.

Laura Hobson, author of the novel on prejudice *Gentlemen's Agreement*, criticized the lovableness of Archie's bigotry. She argued that bigotry by its very nature cannot be lovable and it is certainly not funny. Regarding the nature of Archie's bigotry, Lear replied:

"Archie Bunker . . . (is) a bigot motivated not by hate, but by fear – fear of change, fear of anything he doesn't understand – he knows that Mike and Gloria will jump his every bigoted remark, which

indeed they do, so he tries forever to sneak them by. . . .

" . . . (W)e mustn't expect Mike to convince Archie of anything. A liberal will not change the mind of a bigot that way, not on television and not in real life."

Regarding the combination of lovableness and bigotry, Lear suggested that all of us have known at least one close relative or friend whom we have " . . . absolutely adored . . . (and) thought lovable, who one day shocked and surprised (us) with a flash of prejudice (we) never guessed was there." He argued that Archie did not fit the stereotype of the thoroughly despicable bigot and that if he did, viewers would not identify with him. Portraying Archie as a lovable bigot allows viewers to see the prejudice which lurks within us all.

Other lovable bigots have been featured in the new comedies. Fred Sanford's prejudice against Puerto Ricans was directed against his neighbor, Julio Fuentes. George Jefferson's prejudice against whites was first directed against his neighbor, Archie, and later, on his own program, against his neighbor, Tom Willis.

Unlike its predecessors, the new situation comedy, led by "All In The Family," sometimes leaves its plots unresolved. In one episode, Gloria is raped and is confronted by the dilemma which many rape victims have faced: should she go to the police and risk being treated as a criminal herself or should she avoid such potential treatment and let the rapist go free? The episode leaves the viewer without a simple answer to this complex dilemma.

Opinions are mixed about the accuracy with which the black experience is portrayed on entertainment programs today. Donald Bogle has argued that the new comedies do not portray blacks realistically. His analysis is similar to Les Brown's view of the relevancy melodrama:

"The television industry protects itself by putting in a double consciousness. They take authentic issues in the black community and distort them. The humor is still that black people are 'dumb nigger' types. . . .

" . . . Blacks are still not given credit for having insight. If good things happen to them, it's luck, like hitting the number. They still don't have control over their own destinies. The thing that we can ask of television is that black characters be funny and intelligent."

Freedomways devoted a special issue to the topic of the black image in the mass media. In one article, " 'Black' Shows for White Viewers," Eugenia Collier argues that the portrayal of blacks on television continues to be created by whites for whites:

" . . .(T)he presence of blacks on TV has not heralded social progress but has simply demonstrated that an innocuous image of the black community is comforting and entertaining to white viewers and therefore profitable to big money interests."

The charge that black shows are written by whites to entertain whites has been echoed by Redd Foxx, the star of "Sanford and Son." In 1974 Foxx walked out on the show over a disagreement with its producers. During that controversy, Foxx, in an interview with *Ebony*, criticized the producers for acquiring too few scripts from black writers. Further, those few black scripts they did purchase were rewritten by whites. As a result, he said, the show reflected "white versions of black humor." Foxx also thought that black directors should be used and that the show would benefit from their direction. In response, the producer stated that any material which either Foxx or costar Demond Wilson " . . . felt would be offensive to black viewers would be stricken from the scripts without question."

Although Collier finds "Good Times" to be a positive portrayal of blacks, one of its major flaws is Florida's depiction as an unemployed homemaker:

"A very serious flaw is the fact that Florida apparently does not work. In this respect, she resembles more closely the middle class white housewife than the black woman, whose life style has traditionally revolved around the necessity to work and still maintain her home. Indeed, this necessity is part of her agony and part of her strength. Without it, Florida is diminished."

In 1974, "That's My Mama" premiered on ABC. The series featured Clifton, a carefree 25-year-old bachelor who, nevertheless, was still tied to his mother's apron strings. Clifton owned a barber shop which was attached to the family home. Thus, his mother could easily keep track of his comings and goings. She wasn't always successful, however. The first episode featured a young black woman who was trying to con Clifton into believing that he had impregnated her after picking her up at a bar. Clifton was supposed to have had so much to drink that he didn't know what he was doing at the time or remember it later.

The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) objected to the demeaning portrayal of blacks during the 1974 season. Reminiscent of the NAACP's 1951 criticism of "Amos 'n' Andy," the NBFO listed the following objections to the way blacks are portrayed in prime time entertainment programs:

1. Black shows are slanted toward the ridiculous with no redeeming counter images;

2. Third World people are consistently cast in extremes;

3. When blacks are cast as professional people, the characters they portray generally lack professionalism and give the impression that black people are incapable and inferior in such positions;

4. When older persons are featured, black people are usually cast as shiftless derelicts or nonproductive individuals;

5. Few black women in TV programs are cast as professionals, paraprofessionals, or even working people;

6. Black children, by and large, have no worthy role models on television.

Ethnic Situation Comedies

Situation comedies with an ethnic flavor mushroomed in the 1975-76 season. Characters portraying people of Irish, Italian, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Japanese, and Polish descent have been featured on such situation comedies as "Barney Miller," "Welcome Back, Kotter," "On the Rocks," "The Montefuscos," "Joe and Sons," "Chico and the Man," and "Popi."

The standard situation comedy format derives its humor from a situation, usually a trivial one, creating a problem which the characters try to resolve. In the ethnic comedies, the humor of the situations is often based on stereotypes associated with the characters' ethnicity.

In early episodes of "Chico and the Man," Chico was often told to "Go back to Mexico and take your flies with you" and the other characters in "On the Rocks" frequently complained about

Fuentes's smelly Puerto Rican toilet water.

Instead of realistically exploring issues related to the characters' ethnic backgrounds, as Norman Lear attempts to do, these comedies do not deal with controversial issues. "On the Rocks" was set in a minimum security prison. It could have explored the quality of the American penal system. Instead, it focused on inmate antics. John J. O'Connor, of the *New York Times*, has criticized this series' failure to address itself to meaningful issues regarding the reality of prison life:

"There is a certain comedy atrocity with roots deeply embedded in television. The trick is to reduce something that might be powerfully disturbing to a level of silly meaninglessness. . . .

"What is even more unsettling, . . . the script stresses that this particular 'minimum security' prison, nestled in mid-America, is 'not such a bad slammer.' As inmates cavort 'to beat the system' overseen by cream puff guards, the general atmosphere is threatening to neither prison population nor viewing audience."

Similarly, "Welcome Back, Kotter," which is set in a Brooklyn high school, features students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, all in need of remedial help. Series humor frequently revolves around the efforts of the "Sweathogs" to outsmart their teacher, to waste class time, and in other ways to try to beat the system. They usually get away with it.

In addition to humor based on ethnic stereotypes and the use of a wide variety of ethnic types, these series have another common thread: they rarely feature minority women. On "Barney Miller" six detectives of various ethnic backgrounds are featured; all are male. "Joe and Sons" and its replacement, "Popi," both depicted the life of a widower and his two sons; the former were Italians and the latter were Puerto Ricans. The prisoners and guards of "On the Rocks" were all male and most of the "Sweathogs" of "Welcome Back, Kotter" are male. The ethnic situation comdies, set in an all-male world, have excluded women except in secondary roles as wives, mothers, or lovers.

Carrascolendas, produced in San Antonio, features a variety of bilingual Latino characters. The show has been seen on PBS.

The Portrayal of Women in Situation Comedy

Several MTM productions have also attempted to do realistic situation comedy. These programs all feature women. "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," which premiered in 1970, was the first of this new wave of situation comedies. In contrast to most portrayals of single women in television, the series explored Mary's status as a single, professional woman who did not have marriage uppermost in her mind. Mary's best friend, Rhoda, was the character who was more interested in finding a man. Soon after her series spun off from the "Mary Tyler Moore Show" in 1974, "Rhoda" was married. Mary's other friend, Phyllis, is featured as a widow in a new series by that name which debuted in 1975.

When situation comedies have portrayed the formerly married, they most typically have been widowed. Single parent families were first popular in the late 1960s, but divorce was never the cause of the singleness. "Here's Lucy," with Lucille Ball, and "Julia," with Diahann Carroll, both featured widowed mothers.

Two series of the 1975-76 season – "Fay" and "One Day at a Time" – featured divorcees, characters who were until recently taboo as series leads in television comedy. These series, "Phyllis," and, in the 1976-77 season, "Rhoda," attempt to deal with a woman's problems in trying "to make a go" of being alone: relocating, getting a job, raising children, and developing new relationships with both sexes. "One Day at a Time" and "Phyllis" both explore the theme of parent-child (in these cases mother-daughter) communication.

Beginning with "I Love Lucy," women have always been far more frequently portrayed in comedy roles than in serious ones. In an article about the portrayal of women in the fall 1973 schedule, Gail Rock reports that 34 dramatic series starred men and none starred women. Women starred only in situation comedies – in that year, four. In her analysis of the female television comdey role, Rock argues that Lucy served as the prototype for femal characters:

"Lucille Ball ('Here's Lucy' on CBS) pretty much wrote the rule book for the standard "dumb broad" format that has dominated the TV image of women . . .

" . . . The Lucille Ball situation comedy model is a zany child-woman who is dumb and innocent and who has to be patronizingly disciplined by the husband/father/boss. (In situation comedies starring women, there is always a dominant male. Women are never independently in charge of their own lives.) This format depends for much of its comedy on the woman manipulating the man: tricking, deceiving, flirting, coddling, finally admitting she's doing wrong and being forgiven. It is, thankfully, going out of style, though remnants of it still persist in even the most updated shows."

The women in situation comedies still tend to be subordinate to men in their lives. Mary calls her boss "Mr. Grant" even though everyone else calls him "Lou." Edith scoots into the kitchen to fetch Archie a beer and rarely fails to have dinner on the table by 6 p.m. Louise Jefferson's desire to seek employment has been both criticized and impeded by her husband, George.

Although the pattern of male dominance lingers, some female characters have grown stronger over the years. In 1975 Maude waged an active campaign for the State Assembly despite Walter's threat to divorce her. Gloria has on more than one occasion brought to Mike's attention his tendency to make decisions for her. And Edith Bunker stands up to Archie in defining what is right and wrong.

The new situation comedies are attempting to portray women more realistically than in the past. Willingness to explore controversial issues has resulted in the treatment of issues pertinent to women: rape, unwanted pregnancy, or job discrimination. Futhermore, the attempt to deal with issues such as these seems to have enriched the portrayals of the females in situation comedies.

6.2

Nicholas Johnson served as an FCC Commissioner from 1966 to 1973. He has been characterized as "a noisy reformer," "unorthodox," "flamboyant," and "radical." During his tenure he consistently and publicly fought for the rights of citizens, and wrote How to Talk Back to Your Television Set, *a book exploining just what those rights were. Johnson was chairperson of the National Citizens' Committee for Broadcasting, in Washington, from 1977-1979.* In this article he lists some frequent arguments and counterarguments about violence on television. Do you agree with POINT or COUNTERPOINT?*

Television, Violence, and the Public Interest

by Nicholas Johnson
from the
*Ann Landers Encyclopedia**

Point: Nobody has yet categorically proved that televiolence does any real harm.

Counterpoint: Over 500 studies conducted over the last twenty-six years all singled out television violence as, at a very minimum, a contributing factor in the growing tide of violent behavior that has swelled up in America.

Point: Children know that TV is not real, and they are not affected by its messages.

Counterpoint: Particularly for young children, who know little of external realities and have nothing to compare TV to, the TV screen becomes their reality, substituting and masquerading its portrayal of events for those that are going on in the real world. Indeed, programmers, designers, and writers do everything possible to duplicate the real world environment. To conclude that "seeing is not believing" contradicts the basic tenets of Madison Avenue advertising.

* *He was succeeded in 1979 by Ralph Nader.*

* *"Television, Violence, and the Public Interest" by Nicholas Johnson, from* The Ann Landers Encyclopedia *by Ann Landers. Copyright © 1978 by Esther P. Lederer. Ann Landers columns Copyright © 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978 by Field Newspaper Syndicate. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.*

Point: Violence in television is only a reflection of the violence in society at large.

Counterpoint: The problem here is deeper than one initially suspects. Television has so inundated us with crimes against humanity that people now believe that most crimes are of this nature. In fact, though, the bulk of crimes recorded by the police involve money or property. And more often than not, the criminal never even sees his victim. Secondly, the assertion that violence on TV reflects the violence in real life is patently false. The crimes that are routinely committed on TV nightly drama are relatively infrequent in real life. An FBI Crime Report showed that while 14 percent of all television crimes were homicides, only 0.65 percent of the crimes actually committed last year were of a similar nature. In addition the role of law enforcers is grossly misrepresented [on television]. In real life, most police officers rarely, if ever, fire their guns. On TV, however, over 75 percent were shown engaged in violent behavior.

Point: Imposed restrictions on the amount of violence that can be shown on TV contravenes all First Amendment principles of free expression.

Counterpoint: The advocates of free speech confuse censorship with a legitimate interest that parents have in protecting their children. Never has the First Amendment been invoked to protect one group's freedom at the expense of another group's proven and anticipated harm. We have a compelling interest in raising America's children unencumbered by the social and moral handicaps that television violence inflicts, and that interest alone justifies any alleged "censorship" on the part of the regulators.

Point: We only give the public what it wants.

Counterpoint: Only when someone can prove that there is a biological need for sadism will this argument make any sense. People do not write the networks and plead for more brutality on television. Rather, the programming execs, knowing the ease and frugality with which they can turn out carbon-copy killings, force it upon the viewers. And when these "shoot-em-up" dramas get decent ratings, the smug network people remark with satisfaction, "See, we're giving them what they want." To paraphrase an apt parable which illuminates the ludicrousness of their position:

If you tie a cow to a post, she will eat the grass that she can reach. This does not mean that she prefers it.

6.3 In Conversation with Susan Harris

The creator and producer for ABC's Soap, Susan Harris also writes for the show. Although Soap has been known for its fast-paced irreverent comedy, producer/writer Harris stresses that characterization is central to any good drama.

"At Best a Compromise"

It's been said that Soap was conceived more elaborately and more expensively than any other half-hour situation comedy, but its manner is the thing that's most arresting. You're dealing with dangerous topics, topics that television has only handled gingerly, like homosexuality and adultery. And yet you're turning these very serious subjects into comedy. How have you been able to do that? How did you get it by the networks?

First of all, we're not taking serious, sensitive subjects and making fun of them in any way. We're merely treating them comedically. Comedy is the flip side of tragedy, and it's just one view of the world. But we combine that with very real moments. We don't make fun of things. And it really isn't a question of getting it by the networks; they're adults, you can't fool them. It involved generally a give and take, a fight most every week with the Bureau of Standards and Practices over what they'll accept and what they won't, and you win some battles, and you lose some battles. Generally, I'd say our track record with the ABC censors is very good. They're a bright bunch of people, and they've been fairly sensitive about it.

In some ways your show really is about stereotypes. Don't you think you're parodying what we see as . . .

I'd say we were guilty of that in the beginning, but only because the show hadn't developed enough, and the characters hadn't developed enough, to take on the dimensions of people. Once we were on long enough, and once we could really go into story and character, the people became more three-dimensional.

Does such a continuing format allow for that kind of character development?

Yes, and it's really an enormous luxury to have as a writer.

That's rare in a television comedy, isn't it?

That's mainly the reason I wanted to do *Soap*. As I said, it's a tremendous luxury. You don't have to tell the story in twenty-three minutes, so you can have scenes that don't advance the plot. Some are just these terrific talk scenes about whatever you want to write about. It's wonderful to be able to do that as a writer. The actors love it. It's terrific not to have to tell a story every week.

Which is very unusual in the TV form, isn't it?

Yes.

How was Soap conceived then? It is very different from what is normally on prime-time television.

I wanted to do a continuing story about middle-class, upper-middle-class people. I wasn't out to parody soaps; what I really wanted to do was not be tied down to a story every week. I wanted to be able to have a continuing saga. We started with two sisters as the pivotal point, and then gradually got other members of the family. And so it evolved.

Soap was originally my idea, and then I sat down with Paul Witt and Tony Thomas, my partners, and it evolved from there. We took it to the networks. They loved it and said, "Go ahead and write the script." They loved the script and said, "Let's shoot the pilot."

When you're beginning the creation of the series and you've got the backstories – information summarizing what's happened before in the characters' lives – and the exposition, what kind of guidelines do you have for getting a lot of information across to your audience in a fairly short amount of time?

You have to do it in very underhanded ways. You can't stop a story to give the audience the information that it needs. You have to weave it into what you're doing. It's one of the hardest

things to do, and one of the most unsatisfying things to do. But you have to do it.

What do your viewers tell you when they write to you? What kind of comments do you get about the show? Do you get a lot of negative mail?

I never get negative mail. It's extraordinary. In the beginning we did get some. In fact, we got most of our negative mail before the show was even *aired*. And now I'd say that it's just about one hundred percent positive mail. I did get some negative mail after Elaine was killed. There were a lot of objections to that. People liked the character and were outraged to see her die. People get very attached to the characters. They tend to take them very seriously, much more seriously than I take them, and they get very attached to them. They also treat them as if they're real.

Does that give you responsibility to keep your audience in mind?

I almost never think of the audience. If you start thinking about the audience and second-guessing, you're going to get into a lot of self-censorship. I have to do it for *me*. I like to think that I care enough about what I do and take enough pride in it to do well and to do it in good taste. So first of all I have to please me; otherwise, it's no fun. I notice that by doing that, I'm pleasing millions of other people as well. But I never consciously take them into consideration. Occasionally, Paul and Tony, who can be more objective about it than I can, will point out to me, "You can't do this; people are going to get really upset." That's really helpful. I need that.

What can't you do on television?

Well, I'm talking about things like, "You can't kill this character; people love him too much." Or, "You can't have that character do that, because they really care about her and they'll hate her for doing that."

What are some of the things that you can't talk about on television because of the kind of medium that TV is? Where are you limited?

We talk about just about everything that we want to talk about. We have not been that restricted. True, it's a medium of compromises, and there are *some* restrictions. It's mostly in the way you say things. It's not so much what you say as how you say it. That's where you start making compromises.

What about Jody, the gay character? Did he draw any kind of reaction from viewers? Have you changed that character at all?

No. We were accused of having changed characters because of pressure from the network and the press, and that was untrue. The characters changed only because they grew. They were on the air more, and they became more three-dimensional.

Do you think that TV writing is an art, and do you think that what TV does is art? Some critics have said that TV is not art at all but environment. It's there *and we deal with the fact of TV all the time in our lives.*

I think television is primarily a business. We get into semantics now. If film is an art, and if writing a novel is art, or a play, then yes, I consider what I do an art. It's creative, I care about it, I have things to say, it's definitely an expression.

But since TV is a business, how does it affect what you do? Does it limit what you can say?

Sure it does. Absolutely.

In what ways?

In that you know that television is at best a compromise. You have Standards and Practices* out there who will tell you each week to delete this or delete that, and they have the last word. After all, you're on their network.

Do you think TV is a verbal medium as much as it's a visual medium?

Writers are totally ignored, most of the time. The *word* is the first thing in the theater, in film, in television – you need a script! I'm just mentioning it as a fact of life, but it's true. It's either the star and his film, or the director.

Soap creator/producer/writer Susan Harris.

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* *Each network has a department that screens all scripts and programs for possible violations of the network's policy. The department acts, in effect, as a censor.*

Do you have a special role because you are writer and producer?

No, in television that's most often the case. It's very common to be a writer and a producer. The idea is that the show is yours, and you want to have that kind of control. You care about it.

What about the experience of being a woman and doing this? Are there many of you around?

No, there aren't. I started writing nine years ago, and at that time I was an oddity. Now I'm not an oddity anymore. There are many more women, although the proportion to men is very small. But at least we're no longer oddities.

Why has it been so difficult for women to get where you are in television? Has it been training or lack of preparation?

Just like in anything else, it's because we're women. I wasn't taken seriously in the beginning. I remember one of the very first remarks somebody made to me was, "She can't look like that and write." The two were mutually exclusive as far as he was concerned. So I had to write in order to be taken seriously, whereas if I had been a man that would never have been a question. Also, there were times when I showed a certain amount of strength and said, "Look, I want it done this way," and really took over the situation and was fairly agressive. Because of this I was called all kinds of names. If I had been a man, it never would have been mentioned. I would have been doing exactly what a man does in that poisition – which is to do what has to be done.

You take charge.

Exactly.

What are the odds of getting a new show on the air?

There are many shows that don't get beyond the pilot stage. There are many good shows that get cancelled. The odds are overwhelming against staying on the air at all, but to have a hit show is next to impossible. Production companies make a certain amount of pilots each year – let's say about fifty pilots. To set the schedule, the networks will see what it is they'll have to cancel, and how many hours there are to fill. Whatever the amount of hours they have to fill, they fill with the pilots they made. Generally, no more than eight or nine new shows get on the air. And the others? That's it, goodbye! And when you get on the air, most new shows fail. So the odds, as I said, are really against having a hit.

Think about high school students for a moment. Critical viewing implies that kids learn how to look at something and begin to be able to reject or accept, based on their own values and feelings and the things that they want. To begin to see the trees in the forest, if you will – and to have the ability to appreciate what's good and

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A scene from Soap: some advance the plot, some don't. "The actors love it," says creator/producer Susan Harris.

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what's bad. If you were going to talk to a group of high school kids, what would you tell them to make them aware of TV, and to see TV as it is?

I think the most important thing is to keep reminding them it's television. It's not the real world. I think that is one of television's dangers. People begin to think that it's the real world, and it's not. That's one of television's sins. I would love to see television expand its consciousness a little, and to start to do more real things.

I have an eleven-year-old son who watches television, and sometimes I'm a bit frightened about television's influence on him. But I have to assume that he's bright enough, and perceptive enough to know the difference, to know that it's television and not life. I think the only way you can do that is to talk. Parents talking to their kids about the experience of TV.

6.4 In Conversation with Joseph Aguayo

Joseph Aguayo at the Children's Television Workshop sees a lack of positive Hispanic role models in the media, but he suggests the trend is changing with the slowly increasing number of Latinos working in front of and behind the camera.

Buenas Noches, Frito Bandito . . .

Tell us about the Latino image and the media.

For the longest time there has been almost no image, no clearly defined roles and certainly no super Latinos. Of course, we had the Frito Bandito, but that was not the kind of role model we sought. Interestingly enough, there was a positive figure in the early days of television, the character of Ricky Ricardo on *I Love Lucy*. Here was a man who spoke in a different accent, sometimes difficult to understand, a man whose wife worked with him, a Cuban. *That* was by way of exception. Since that time such characterizations have been few and far between. We had Freddie Prinze, who was on his way to becoming a strong image for young Latinos, and now Erik Estrada of *Chips*. Estrada is becoming the new Latin idol. He represents the best features of bilingual education, speaks English well, and has dark good looks and personality. Estrada is Puerto Rican, but portrays a Chicano. That might not have been possible several years ago. Chicanos wanted Chicanos to play Chicanos. Puerto Ricans wanted Puerto Ricans to play Puerto Ricans, and the like. But in the past two or three years that has changed. Those who have been successful have been projected in a sense as super-Latin, transcending regional ties. It's a trend we hope is a positive one. Now a Chicano will portray Freddie Prinze in his life story; a few years ago there was an outcry from Chicanos when Prinze, a Puerto Rican, went to Hollywood to portray one of them. They felt if you were portraying Mexican-Americans you should pick a Chicano. Prinze looked like a Chicano. It was a matter of artistic license.

Sesame Street was also roundly criticized in its first season for having no Latinos on the program. Then we recruited Sonia Manzano, a Puerto Rican who grew up in New York, to be our Maria, and Luiz Delgado, a Chicano from California, to be our Emilio. They are bilingual people who work effectively in English and Spanish, but who use different words and different perceptions from different cultures. Yet they demonstrate in very clear and positive ways that they are Latin. Outside of the Muppets they are the two most liked and recognized members of the cast. Here I think is the positive use of Latino personalities, people who reinforce positive role models for Latino youngsters and who are also accepted by all youngsters alike.

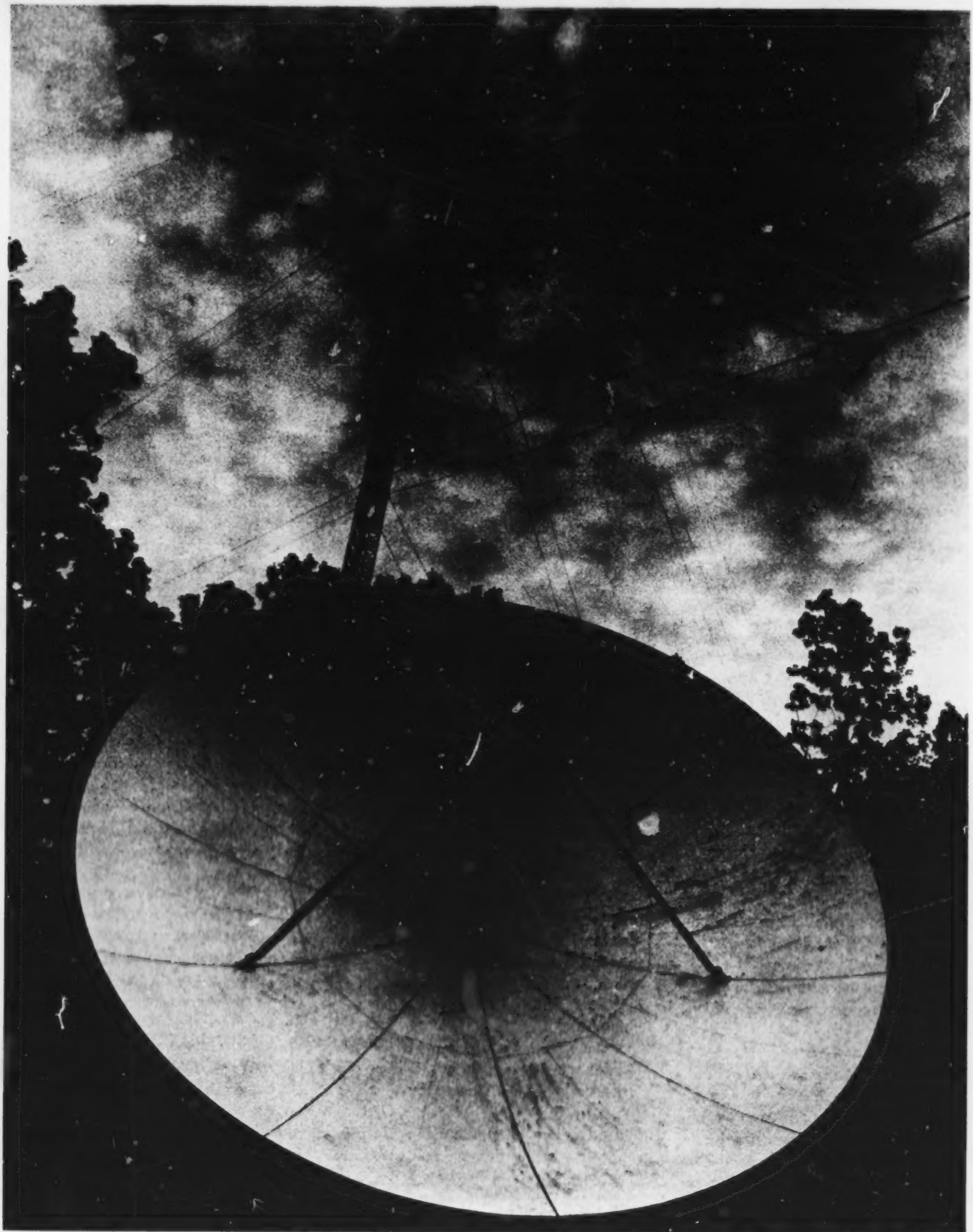
While I can point out to these few significant success stories, there still remains something of a vacuum. The American media do not understand what constitutes the Latino personality. The media see our language as foreign, and yet Spanish was spoken in the southern regions of California and Texas long before the Anglos came. At present, Spanish is the second largest language in the United States and is the surrounding environment for many in California, Texas, New York, and Chicago. There are ten states with a predominantly Latin flavor. Spanish is not as foreign as some would think.

What about the Latino image in commercials?

While there are not enough positive images of Latinos in television and radio as I know them, I would say there are now few commercials which stereotype us. At one time it was different, perhaps out of ignorance. American advertisers, being who they are, predominantly white, middle-class, not knowing us and our values, tended to stereotype us. Fortunately, there were groups willing to challenge that, who waged a strong battle. For a long time there were only characters like the Frito Bandito. This was the only media visibility we had. It was as though advertisers were saying at least we're good for this. Latin groups fought against these images. As I talk to you, I am watching a Spanish channel here in New York, and I have not seen one problematic commercial. I think advertisers have become aware that this kind of stereotyping will not do. What will do is more positive identification with those values that we have in America and that just as America is made of different faces and different colors, so too should its media images. It's happening slowly. Certainly on the coasts we are seeing more and more Latin faces in front of the camera, and behind the camera, like Fred DeCordova, producer of *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, Erik Estrada, Jose Ferrer, as well as Jose Quintero and Raul Julia of Broadway fame. As for advertising itself, I think advertisers are to be credited with making the changes they have. They have thought more about the consequences of what they do in terms of the messages they project, and they have had direct impact on what the writers and producers and production houses do.

What kind of role models does television offer to young Latinos?

I think for most kids the medium in a neutral element. Youngsters who are still in a fantasy world of their own love to see fantasy characters and want to see personalities who loom larger than life. Look at the phenomenon of a character like the Hulk, or Wonder Woman, or the Six Million Dollar Man, who are human but can become superhuman. This power is destructive against evil. Youngsters are fascinated by that. Now the problem comes when you are portraying real people, and in particular, ethnic people. How do you flesh them out? Like J.J., as a super fop, a funny guy who leads the hustle, or Superman, whom no one can believe?



Satellite dishes receive, amplify and retransmit television signals across great distances.

Unit 7 A Saving Radiance?

I believe television is going to be the test of the modern world, and that in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance of the general peace or a saving radiance in the sky.
We shall stand or fall by television – of that I am quite sure.
– E. B. White
1938

E. B. White is a well-known essayist and novelist. He is author of children's favorites Charlotte's Web *and* Stuart Little.

* *coaxial cables: wires for carrying television signals from a source point (i.e., a network) to a transmission source (local TV station, or CATV tower).*

Most people today think of television in familiar terms: there are three commercial networks and a public television system. Programs are broadcast through the air from a station transmitter to the home television antenna. There are just a few choices of what to watch. Some shows are good, some are bad, and there is little anybody can do to make important changes.

But television is beginning to change. Observers of the industry are forecasting that within a short while it will bear little resemblance to its present structure. Some recent developments include *cable television; communications satellites; QUBE, or two-way television; and home video systems.*

Cable television, which involves the transmission of signals over coaxial cables,* is becoming popular as an alternative to commercial broadcast television. Cable users pay a monthly subscription fee – usually between ten and fifteen dollars – to a local cable company. Subscribers receive programming of much greater variety than is available from conventional broadcast sources: news and other public affairs, first-run movies, local and national sports, instructional and "how-to" programs, children's shows, and so on. Reception on cable sets is clear and sharp. In time, cable users will be able to choose from among several dozen different programs at any one time – some programs with general appeal, some for specialized audiences.

Until recently, cable television was held back by a complex tangle of local, state, and federal regulations that tended to protect the interest of conventional broadcasting stations. Regulations are now easing, allowing hundreds of community cable companies to expand their services. Cable television is expected to reach 30 percent of American homes by 1981 or 1982. At that stage, marketing statistics indicate, its use should begin to increase sharply.

Some cable companies offer "pay channels" which some people call "feevee." Cable subscribers who want feevee pay extra money to watch certain special programs such as live cultural events, recently released movies, and major sports programs. *Home Box Office* (HBO) is our country's first national pay TV network, owned by Time, Incorporated. Sharing its revenues with local cable companies, it provides almost half a million viewers with sports, movies, children's shows, and live nightclub acts. HBO charges its users a flat monthly fee in exchange for offering the kind of program assortment not usually available on commercial broadcast television.

Communications satellites have also opened the way to much greater variety in the programs we will be able to choose from in the future. Since the early 1960s, communications satellites have been launched into *synchronous orbit* – that is, they travel at the speed of the earth's rotation, thereby appearing to remain in one place in the sky. These satellites re-

RCA

Lost in space: *RCA's Satcom III, launched in December 1979, lost all contact with Earth stations and has not been heard from since. Had it operated as planned, it would have been a versatile machine: 24 transponders providing for 24 simultaneous broadcast channels, or more than 14,000 telephone conversations, or 1.5 billion bits of data per second.*

ceive, amplify, and retransmit television signals across great distances. The use of satellites is proving to be cheaper than relay by microwave or cable. A single satellite can relay as many as twenty-four different television program signals at the same time.

RCA has recently developed its own satellite system allowing properly equipped stations to receive, select, and broadcast a wide range of non-network programming directly, without a network as "middle man."

QUBE, a revolutionary *two-way* television system developed by Warner Communications, was put into operation in Columbus, Ohio, in 1978. QUBE television receivers are in sixty thousand homes, connected by cable to an elaborate computerized headquarters from which a great variety of programs are sent out. QUBE subscribers can "talk back" in reaction to what they see by pushing buttons on their television sets. They can express approval or disapproval and register opinions on public issues. The results flash up on their QUBE screens five seconds later. But QUBE can do far more than register subscribers' reactions. It can help them do their shopping, pay their bills, and do their banking. It can also be used as a combination watch dog and fire alarm system.

See Reading 7.1, "QUBE"

Home video systems – which can record and play back TV programs – are rapidly growing in popularity. Consumers with home video playback systems can already buy a large assortment of network programs on video cassettes, although at considerable cost. By 1980 several companies were preparing to market the much cheaper *videodisk*, which resembles a long-playing record. Also, by the late 1970s, *videogames* had become popular with the American public. In all three cases, the television set is used for the first time to display material that the consumer has immediately at hand within the home.

These developments, happening now and in the near future, almost certainly spell the *decline of the centralized, three-network system of commercial broadcast television*. The publicly owned airwaves provide for only a handful of program choices because of the limited range of broadcast frequencies that can be used for transmission. Television has historically been a system designed to reach the largest possible audience. But in the future it may become much more like our local media center, in which we are given the opportunity to choose from a huge array of sources. No longer will a program be considered a failure for reaching only ten or twenty million viewers, as is the case now. And with so many more programs to select from, television viewers may begin to approach the medium in a different way. They will perhaps be more purposeful and conscientious about what they choose to watch.

Progress Must Be Profitable

The roadblock to progress isn't lack of brains, equipment, or desire. It is money. No advances will be made with television unless they are seen as profitable. As it stands now, in the early 1980s, the developments described above are giving signs that they will turn a profit. Hungry for more choice and for more control over the program material that enters their homes, more and more Americans are looking favorably upon these innovations.

As new systems gather momentum, network television will become less of a force. Still, network television is so entrenched that it is unlikely to be unseated altogether. Big business survives because it adapts to changing social trends and consumer patterns, and the networks are no exception. Throughout the late 1970s, for instance, while cable expanded with surprising vigor, the networks displayed their own healthy growth, and the broadcast industry as a whole showed greater profits than ever before. And in years to come the networks' parent companies (CBS, Inc.; The American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.; and RCA) will probably be able to adjust to changing communications technology.

See Reading 7.2,
"Bye-Bye, Nightly News"

In the Meantime . . .

For the present, most Americans make their selections from the offerings of the three commercial networks and do so for an average of more than forty-five hours per week. As long as the choices are so limited for most people, executives in charge of network programming will continue to seek the widest possible audience by serving up the "least objectionable" fare.

In 1979, very young children (aged two to five) watched an average of almost thirty-three hours of television a week, eight and a half hours per week more than the average teenager. Children aged six to eleven watched twenty-nine hours a week. For children, television is not a harmless toy. But it *is* a convenient babysitting service. Small children like television. Usually it makes little difference what the program is – just *watching* it is fun.

Activity 1

Parenting with Television

Gather in small groups. Assume that you are the parents of small children. Decide what standards you would set for your children and their use of television.

For families who watch an average amount of television – and for individual users, too – turning off the set for a period of time can be an act that demands unusual discipline and willpower. It has been shown that heavy viewers actually suffer withdrawal symptoms when they suddenly stop watching TV.

In the spring of 1979, the PBS program *Bill Moyers' Journal* aired two episodes entitled "TV or Not TV?" produced by WCCO in Minneapolis. The program explored what happens when families are suddenly without their television sets. Forty-five random telephone calls were made to households in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, making this offer: give up watching TV entirely for thirty days in exchange for $500 cash. Of forty-five families called, twenty-seven said no, it wouldn't be worth it. Some were elderly people, with television as their only "friend." Others didn't think the cash payment was worth it. Several other suggested that without television they feared a breakdown in family relations.

Of those who agreed to the experiment, many suffered pangs of withdrawal: nervousness, boredom, bickering with other family members, irritability. On the other hand, many began to enjoy more active experiences: playing with their children, getting more exercise outdoors, reading, talking with each other.

But this was an unusual case. It is unlikely any of the rest of us will be offered money to stop watching television. And, considering that there is much that is useful and good about commercial and public television programs, turning off the set altogether may not be the most desirable step to take for many of us. We can live with television, but we must be able to use it properly and be aware that we can have an impact on its quality. We can help television fulfill its responsibility to us as viewers.

You Can Make a Difference

The television industry regards you, as a viewer, in two different ways: first, you are a part of the television audience that is being delivered, as a commodity, to sponsors: second, you are a consumer who may or may not go out and spend money on an advertised product.

How you, in turn, regard the television industry at this point is less certain. Perhaps now that you've read this book you've developed new attitudes about television.

Although we usually hear that the television industry responds only to the tastes of a massive number of people, in some cases smaller groups of citizens have had an effect on television. During the 1960s, for example, WLBT, a commercial station in Jackson, Mississippi, came under attack by the area's black population for not abiding by the Fairness Doctrine. The United Church of Christ, in particular, submitted to the FCC a petition to deny the renewal of WLBT's license on the grounds that the station was ignoring the black population and was therefore in violation of the Fairness

Doctrine. Although the FCC did not at that time deny WLBT's license renewal, the court of appeals for the District of Columbia agreed with the United Church of Christ and reversed the FCC's decision. In 1969, WLBT's owners, Lamar Life Insurance, lost their license to operate the station. The action proved that a station's license could be denied on substantial grounds, as a result of citizen action.

Other citizens' groups have had success in changing television. Action for Children's Television (ACT), for example, has recently been instrumental in reducing the amount of advertising on children's programs, in improving the quality of children's commercials, and in eliminating commercial "pitches" by hosts of children's shows. And the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting (NCCB) has had a noticeable effect on encouraging advertisers to drop their sponsorship of television programs that contain violence.

If you have a complaint about television, there are some possible courses of action for you, both through local stations and sponsors.

- Your local stations – affiliates, independents, and PBS – are responsible for everything they broadcast – network as well as local programs, commercials, and public service announcements. Station managers can refuse to air any network program for any reason they may have. They also choose, of course, what local and syndicated shows they will broadcast.
- Local stations tend to be more responsive to the communities they serve than are the networks, which, strictly speaking, do not directly serve the local communities at all. Some local stations show their good will by providing time for *public access*, when area citizens can go on the air free of charge to address an issue of concern.
- Call or write your local station (a letter has more lasting value) for any substantial complaint you have. Make sure to explain the reasons for your dissatisfaction. In most cases your letter will be read. You may receive a response, and action may be taken. If, for example, enough people object to the airing of a particular show, the local station may decide to drop it from their schedule.
- Sponsors – companies that participate in programs with their commercials – are generally receptive to well thought-out criticism in letters. Some companies have withdrawn advertising support from certain television shows because of letter-writing campaigns from citizens' groups. For instance, in 1976 Sears and Burger King were rated by the NCCB as among the top ten "most violent sponsors" (advertisers who support a lot of violent programming) of the year. Apparently in response to viewer protest, both these companies changed their advertising habits dramatically. In 1978, both Sears and Burger King were listed by the NCCB as leaders among sponsors of nonviolent programming.

Where to Write

For further information on government regulation of broadcasting and television advertising, write to:

Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Federal Trade Commission
Pennsylvania Avenue at 6th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20580

To offer praise or register complaints about network programming, write to:

ABC-TV
1330 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10019

CBS-TV
51 West 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

NBC-TV
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10020

Public Broadcasting Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza West SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Television has come a long way since 1929, when Vladimir K. Zworykin first demonstrated the television picture tube he invented. Called the iconoscope, pictured here with its inventor, it is substantially the same as the ones used in television sets today.

Whatever new forms of television are introduced to the public over the next few years, and whatever the popularity of current innovations, the television industry will continue to reinforce the viewing behavior of millions of people, who watch *television* rather than *television programs*. It is by becoming critical television viewers that we can control our own use of the medium and its influence on our lives. Those who use television wisely determine their own cultural environment, rather than allowing television to determine it for them.

Reading

7.1 *The article below was written by John Wicklein, a journalist and educator based in Boston, who is writing a book on the social consequences of the new technologies of communication. QUBE, according to John Wicklein, offers enticements – and also has a number of potential problems. Which – if either – do you think outweighs which?*

QUBE

Excerpts from "Wired City, U.S.A.: The Charms and Dangers of Two-Way TV"

by John Wicklein
from *The Atlantic Monthly*
February, 1979

QUBE (a trade name that stands for nothing in particular) is never referred to by its developers as cable television. They speak of two-way cable: one line carries signals from the head end out to the customer, one line relays customer responses back to the head end. Or, better yet, two-way *interactive* cable.

There are reasons for the precise terminology. After all, a burglar is interacting with the system when he takes three steps into a home and sets off an alarm. Most of the television services of QUBE's multiservice offerings are built around its two-way interactive capability. This permits subscribers at home to make decisions about what the system is offering them and then, through the adapter on their standard TV sets, to tell the computer what those decisions are. On the interactive channels, it allows them to "talk back" to their televisions.

"They like to play the system," says one Warner executive, and, indeed, they are being programmed to do that by QUBE's promotional campaign. "Touch the button," says the large, four-color, slick paper brochure, "and enter the era of two-way participation in the infinite, unfolding, never-ending worlds of QUBE."

These worlds include thirty channels controlled by touch buttons on a keypad console about the size of a plug-in electronic calculator. Ten channels provide the commercial and public television stations, a public access channel* (required by the Federal Communications Commission), and a program guide channel. Another ten supply "premium" selections – primarily movies, such as *Julia* and *Equus*, that have not yet appeared on commercial television. Premium Channel 10 supplies something else you don't see on commercial television . . . includ[ing] entertainment specials produced or purchased by QUBE, such self-help courses as "Shorthand" and "How to Prepare for College Entrance Examinations," and local college sports.

Unlike Home Box Office, which charges subscribers a fixed fee for each month of pay-TV programs, QUBE's computer bills viewers for each selection, at prices that range from 75¢ for "Shorthand" to $9.00 (in football-maniacal Columbus) for a live telecast of an Ohio State football game. This is in addition to the $10.95 monthly charge for basic service. You are not a passive viewer when you push a premium channel button, and since the computer is solicitous about your having to make the decision, it allows a two-minute grace period before it enters your selection into its memory.

Computerized two-way systems, if they catch on, can make Nielsen and Arbitron ratings obsolete. They involve no sampling guesswork – the QUBE computer knows down to the last household how many sets are tuned to one of its channels. Says Korodi [Miklos Korodi is QUBE's general manager], "We can give the advertiser demographics he never had before – how many people in the $20,000 to $30,000 bracket are watching this commercial, that sort of thing." The computer, he went on, can cross-refer answers to opinion questions with income groups, to tell which economic class wants what.

The computer is capable of charging an order for a book or other merchandise to the subscriber's credit card or to a charge account at a department store, if the subscriber provides the number to be fed into its memory. This is only a step from another service called Electronic Funds Transfer, or EFT . . . In this, subscribers could select products and pay for them immediately by transferring funds from their bank accounts to the accounts of businesses that advertise goods and services. Each subscriber would have a confidential "personal identification number" that only he could punch into the system, which would tell the computer that he, and not an electronic embezzler, was ordering the money to be transferred.

Cable industry leaders say they are watching QUBE closely, on the chance that interactive cable may provide the new element that will enable the industry to achieve the "critical mass" of 30 percent saturation of American homes – agreed by many to be the magic figure for major economic success – by the early 1980s. Cable now reaches into 19 percent, or about 14 million, of the 72 million homes with TV.

Growth of cable has been steady, but was slow until pay-TV movies and entertainment programs were offered nationally several years ago to systems by HBO and Showtime. These companies distribute their packages to local cable systems by domestic satellite. Warner Cable offers its own package of films and shows, called Star Channel, via satellite.

Financial analysts are looking at cable TV as a growth industry, bearing in mind the forecast by Arthur D. Little Company, the research firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that movies seen and paid for in the home will put movie theaters out of business by 1985. Promoting the use of two-way cable TV to charge subscribers only for the specific films and shows they watch may make this form of home entertainment big business. It is two-way cable's capability of selective billing for entertainment and consumer services that intrigues cable executives responsible for profit and loss. As one TelePrompter official put it, "We feel definitely that two-way will be here ultimately; it just has to be economically viable."

Supplying only those services that can produce a profit makes sound business sense, but it leaves something to be desired from the standpoint of giving people the services they need, some of which will never turn a profit. A channel whereby a city clinic could conduct a medical diagnosis, with responses, of a person who is housebound is a sure money-loser. So are channels that could be used during a local disaster for two-way communication between city security forces and people in their homes. Two-way system operators may find that they have to provide some nonprofit services in return for gaining the franchise to make a profit from a community.

* *public access channel: a channel reserved entirely for the use of the general public to present programs and other material of their own making. The FCC requires such channels in the top 100 markets.*

QUBE has already acknowledged this obligation by offering channel facilities, at no cost to the community, for participatory town meetings and government hearings. One such meeting was held in Upper Arlington, a prosperous suburb in QUBE's franchise area. Using multiple-choice questions, the Upper Arlington Planning Commission asked QUBE subscribers to comment on a draft plan for renewing an older part of the city. The computer was programmed to "narrowcast" the hearing only to those subscribers who lived within the suburb. Two previous public meetings on the issue drew about 125 citizens each. The meeting held by two-way cable TV, the computer reported, attracted two thousand residents during its two and a half hours.

As in other parts of the system, the people of Upper Arlington took part enthusiastically in the interactive programming . . . Some had been hooked on the audience-participation game shows presented by QUBE. In one program that is similar to the national *Gong Show*, viewers can direct the show by pressing the "yes" and "no" buttons to say whether an amateur act should continue. When a majority of those watching press "no," the act is dumped in mid-performance. Now, that kind of power gives a person satisfaction. It is fun. Two-way cable is *fun*. Playing the system, subscribers are only vaguely aware that the preferences they state, the products they select, the personal opinions they express can all be stored in the computer's memory and tallied, analyzed, and cross-referenced with demographic and financial information that is known about them. Several subscribers I interviewed said that they were not concerned by this. One young working woman told me, "I don't feel that I have any reason to be afraid – I may be naive, but I don't care if my opinions are recorded." Their attitudes seemed to be, Who would *want* that stuff, anyway? Who could profit by it?

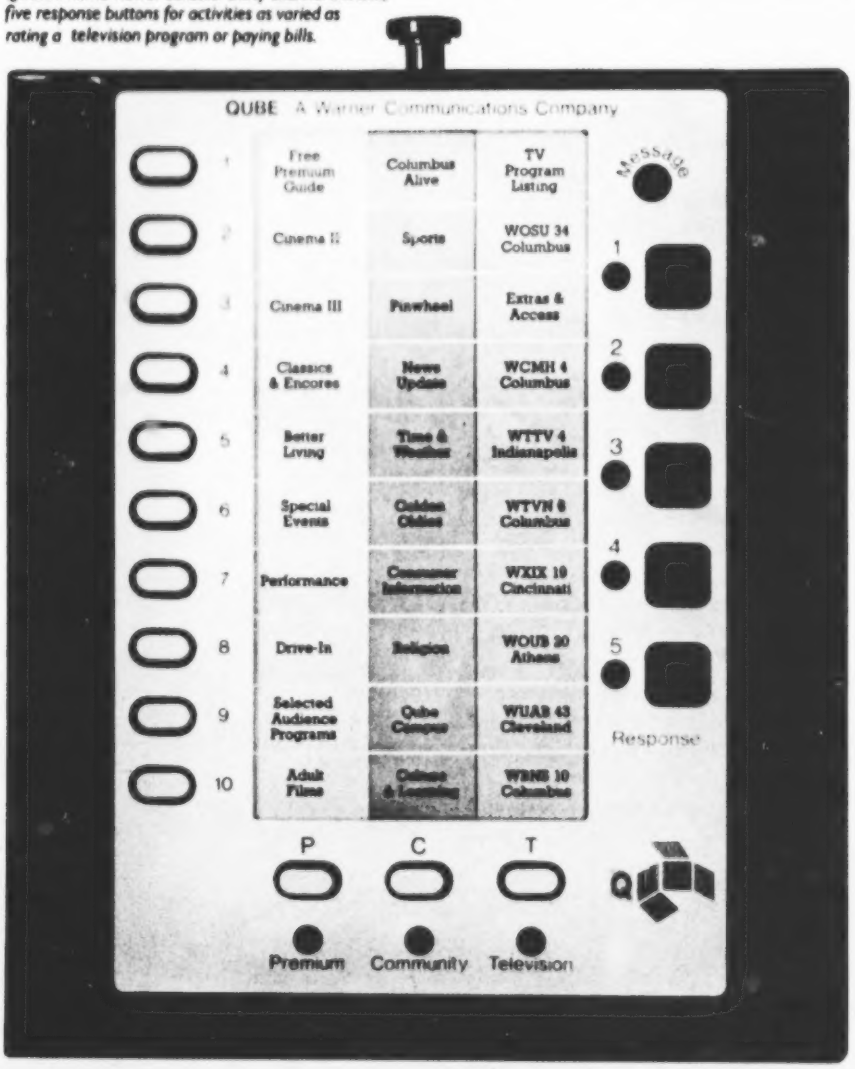
Someone might. Since the QUBE system was installed and its capabilities have become known, reporters, city officials, and others in the community have considered the possibility that two-way cable TV might prove to be a method of invading subscribers' privacy. When I discussed this with QUBE executives, they replied, in effect, "Yes, it *could* happen, but it won't happen here." . . .

Will people drop out of a two-way system if they discover that their interactions are being monitored? First of all, they do not have to be told that they are being monitored: no law requires the cable operator to tell them. But beyond that, people will probably get used to it. Once the services provided by two-way cable TV become almost indispensable, people won't worry about them. They won't, that is, unless objections are raised by consumer protection groups and by legislators concerned with two-way cable's implications for civil liberties. Federal, state, and local legislation is nonexistent in this area. Most systems are franchised by local municipalities, using guidelines set by the Federal Communications Commission. The guidelines say nothing about restrictions on two-way cable.

Bob Kindred, who publishes *Cable TV Programs*, a guide to what can be found on local cable-television systems in the Midwest, would like to see two-way cable thrive. But he is afraid that sometime in the future people will rebel against two-way cable, unless restraints are placed on how it uses the information that its computer collects. "A number of questions they ask, I don't answer," he said. (A vice-president of a Columbus bank had the same thought: "I won't put anything in there I don't want people to know.") People are going to want protection built in by law, Kindred added, "and this will probably help cable." . . .

Clearly, federal law concerning privacy would be preferable to thousands of varying local laws. But just as clearly, some law is needed. Otherwise, the privacy of all two-way cable subscribers is potentially for sale.

QUBE's home viewer console: thirty channel choices, five response buttons for activities as varied as rating a television program or paying bills.



Courtesy of QUBE, Columbus, Ohio

7.2 *Although the arrival of new technologies, and in particular, cable television, portends much for the medium, it almost certainly means the phasing out of standardized network news operations, says Desmond L. Smith, a long-time television news producer. He explains why.*

Bye-Bye, Nightly News

by Desmond L. Smith
from the *New York Times*

TORONTO – The nightly television news viewed by more than 50 million Americans on the three commercial networks is headed for oblivion.

Sometime in the next fifteen years, ABC, CBS, and NBC will almost certainly discontinue their subsidized news operation, just as the big Hollywood news studios dropped their newsreels in the early 1950s, and for the same reason. technological change.

The old mode of delivering a TV picture to homes via a transmission tower owned by a local station is being phased out; cable TV is being phased in.

Cable has plenty of channels. If a subscriber doesn't want what NBC, CBS, or ABC have chosen, he still gets everything else. In Canada, every second home is now on cable. Nearly one of every five American TV homes now subscribes to cable service, as compared with twenty-five TV homes a decade ago.

From now through the 1980s, the size of the audience that the big networks use as the basis of their stupendous advertising rates will be eroded. As network revenues decline, the war between profits and the prestige of subsidizing enormously expensive news divisions will be intensified. What happens when the crunch comes?

TV network news and all that it embraces is the key partner in the matrix of news gathering. According to a recent Roper poll, since 1963 TV has become the public's primary source of news, and TV has widened its lead over other news media as the *most believable* source of news.

So the social and economic implications of the TV transformation underway raise the most profound questions of public policy.

Given the euphoria in Washington among legislators who ought to know better, for "deregulation" of broadcasting, and a mounting tide of popular-magazine articles that hold out the promise of a new golden age of "viewer's lib," the prospects for a reasoned discussion of the future of TV news is not great. Yet the hour is late.

Put simply, the commercial networks' thirty-year dominance of the air is ending. And the drama is taking place in the courts and in the Congress with little or no public discussion of its implications.

For years, cable programming had been restricted. But now, in decision after decision, the courts have struck down the major restrictions that the Federal Communications Commission had placed on cable TV, restrictions that many industry observers have long felt protected the old over-the-air technology from the full potential of cable development.

Further, Congress has substantially rewritten the 1934 Communications Act. The new act, if passed, would deregulate the cable industry at the federal level entirely, a move heartily endorsed by the new FCC chairman, Charles D. Ferris, who appears to be a born-again free-market Democrat.

Cheerleaders for cable TV are shouting the pleasure of first-run movies, operas without commercials, big-time sports events, and a flood of services that will turn the TV screen into a library, a family newspaper, a games center.

But they are strangely silent when you ask: What becomes of national news? Who takes over the network's unprofitable commitment to inform as well as entertain? The great issue, therefore, is how affirmative public-service program requirements can be maintained in a climate where "market forces" are being touted as preferable to regulation. So far neither the courts nor the Congress nor the FCC has raised this question.

Meanwhile, the fateful combining of satellite and cable, the emergence of new "superstations" – local stations that can be seen across the country – and the growth of pay TV spurred by institutional investors wishing to get in on the ground floor of a new industry have created a momentum for change that is impossible now for the networks to reverse. As the huge (80 million homes) over-the-air national audience drains slowly away, the profit picture will change decisively. When that happens, Wall Street will do what it always does – start shuffling its portfolios, out of the Big Three and into those entertainment stocks that appear to have the best toehold on TV's new frontier. Management consultants will then emerge, to suggest "retrenchment" and somewhere along the way they'll ask that famous question: "What business do you *think* you are in?"

The network moguls are not likely to answer "broadcast journalism."

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